

# Etter, Vegvari help students realize their dreams

By Amy Higgins  
Special to the News

To say that Jean Etter has dedicated her life to helping students is an understatement.

Etter, a Peninsula native and former work experience/education coordinator at Peninsula High, taught for 46 years at both the high school and Long Beach City College. In 1964, she began an internship program in the Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District that helped catapult students into extremely successful careers.

"They let me run with the program,"

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In 1995, Etter joined forces with Ted Vegvari, who had just begun Palos Verdes on the Net. "I asked him to take some of my interns who wanted to study computers and technology," she said. "About 300 of my students went through Ted's internships between 1995 and 2000. One of those interns, Hoon Kim, received a \$10,000 scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania, where he double majored in computers and business. He now works with Bill Gates at Microsoft, and helped set up the network at Rancho Palos Verdes City Hall."

Two other interns, Derek Auyoung and Andy Huang, while still in high school, worked together on an animation video called "Kitchen Catastrophe," which was showcased at the Smithsonian Institute on two separate occasions for a month each. "Their video was chosen over those created by many professionals," Etter said.

Auyoung graduated from UCLA and works for the Academy Award-winning company Weta Digital Ltd., based in Wellington, New Zealand. With Weta, Etter said, Auyoung

Etter said. "I thought, 'How many people in this world are unhappy with their jobs?' I wanted [my students] to have experience doing something they're interested in, working with really outstanding professionals with great credentials."

Etter's pupils studied with authorities in many fields, including medicine at Torrance Memorial Medical Center and Kaiser Permanente, and law with top-ranking attorneys. "Almost all the students I had who interned with lawyers actually went into law when they finished school," Etter said. "I even had a student who loved nothing more than surfing. I

recommended he take some accounting and business classes and open his own surf shop. Today he runs one of the most successful surfing businesses around, as well as a surfing competition in Cabrillo."

The internships offered students class credit and grades, in addition to experience. They also learned about important topics like ethics, the danger of identity theft when running a business, how to find jobs and how to conduct themselves during an interview. "I spent a lot of time working one-on-one with them, too," Etter said. "My door was always open."

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was one of the animators of Aslan, the computer-generated lion in the 2005 blockbuster film "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe."

Huang, who graduated from the University of Southern California about a month ago, produced a short animated video entitled "Doll Face," which was a featured clip for months on YouTube.com, a popular video-sharing Web site.

"[PVNET's programs] allow students to stop and take a breath," Vegvari said. "They can then gain confidence, find out about themselves and create. The internships helped, too. It was incredible: Not only did the students learn what they came to learn, but they learned way more than they planned to, with top-notch quality training products. Software changes and technology changes. If you stagnate, you're done."

"I'm trying to get the word out about the wonderful classes offered at the new PVNET Annex," said Etter. "What Ted is offering is a wonderful experience for young people. That's why I've chosen to work with him. He and his staff do wonderful things."

By offering a litany of sum-

mer classes and training programs, the PVNET Annex allows RPV residents to learn everything from on-the-job training to basic computer skills to the latest, cutting-edge animation technology. Mudbox, a software program that allows users to digitally sculpt — three-dimensionally, with high-resolution "brushes" — objects and creatures, which may then be placed into animation software to be brought to life, is only available at a few locations in the United States — PVNET technology center is one of them. Weta used Mudbox in the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy and its 2006 remake of "King Kong" to make the animation and CG creatures come alive.

"The Annex is a toolbox where we can drop in any software and hardware and have all someone needs to have a custom training center," Vegvari said. "You don't have to drive all over L.A. County; it's all right here in your own backyard."