

Recruit the Right Tech Teachers

When computers, cellphones and websites are the subject, it's smart for seniors to learn from students

What brought Audrey Van Buskirk-Hoge to the gleaming, new computer lab at Piscataway, New Jersey's senior center was her desire to become tech savvy so she could communicate better with her four grandchildren.

What kept her there was the free **Senior + Computer Buddy** program, which pairs an older adult in need of tech training with a high school or college student turned technology teacher.

Council member Jim Bullard, a self-declared "aging activist," helped start the computer lab program. "I wanted our seniors to be on the same page as their grandchildren," says Bullard, who has taught Excel at the senior center.

Chor Lee, a retired telecommunications professional who teaches tai chi at the senior center, stepped up to take charge of the lab, which features more than a dozen computers with large monitor screens. Lee writes easy-to-understand training materials. Like the students and other computer lab mentors, he volunteers his time.

"Getting senior citizens and teenagers to interact is healthy for both," says Piscataway Mayor Brian C. Wahler, who directed that the architectural design for the senior center's 2014

renovation and expansion include space for a computer lab. "I'm confident that older adults are learning valuable computer skills while great wisdom and life lessons are being passed down to our younger residents."

Bruno Salgado, a college student who became Van Buskirk-Hoge's computer buddy when he was 16, agrees. "One of the biggest lessons I learned from working with seniors is patience and coming up with ways to teach so they would understand."

Salgado has since taught code and programming games to elementary school-children. "The younger kids can't understand high-level programming concepts, so I used what I learned from my work at the senior center, which was to teach to their level."

Before the computer lab opened, Van Buskirk-Hoge found 21st-century tech intimidating. No more. She now knows how to access a live-stream of her granddaughter's dance competitions. On a helicopter ride over the Grand Canyon, she was able to videotape the experience and send the footage to her family.

Van Buskirk-Hoge says the students in the buddy program are "so kind and respectful. I love them to pieces!" ■

▼ The Senior + Computer Buddy program at the Piscataway Senior Center in New Jersey is free "because of local kids' volunteering," explains the center's website.

