Clubs, Cafés and Classrooms

Technology @ Boys and Girls Clubs

"Quiet on the set!" comes the call as the cameras start recording and the action starts. Kids from the Smithville after-school program of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Bastrop County, TX are recording videos about their experiences with the program as part of a “Great Futures Start Here” campaign.

The children, ranging from 3rd graders to Junior High, are learning digital videography and editing skills as part of technology courses taught by Technology For All in a partnership with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Bastrop County. Along with digital videography, a TFA program specialist has taught courses on Internet Safety and Security, Social Media Safety, Digital Photography, and other technology-related topics.

“Our goal and desired outcome for the use of technology is that youth become more knowledgeable of how to use the Internet and technology safely with the hopes of increasing their academic capacity,” said Prentiss Collins, Interim Director of the club.

Casey Dees, a contract program specialist with TFA that has been working with the club, will help the children compile a 5-7 minute long video presentation. The presentation will be played at fundraising events and posted on the club’s website. A DVD version will be mailed out to donors and interested parties.

“The newly formed partnership with TFA has allowed us to plan and deliver a variety of enhancement activities,” said Collins. “These activities include digital media, game design/development, and Global Positioning Systems (GPS)/Geographical Information Systems (GIS), which will reinforce learning in topics such as reading, writing, geography, math, and science.”

Collins added “As we press forward we also have a common interest in the parents and caregivers of our youth. The plan is that we will offer them training courses that will develop and provide a strong foundation for digital literacy, academic support, and job skills.” Courses offered for parents will include topics such as email basics, time management, family budgets, resume writing/interviewing, and homework help.
interviewed. The following week she came by the PCC and reported that she had been hired and was very thankful for the assistance! She told John after a few months on the job that it was the best job she has had.

Super WiFi

A team of Rice University students recently tested a new technology, “Super WiFi”, in Smithville, Texas, working with Technology For All Training Manager John Dees. The technology takes advantage of the unused analog TV broadcast channels to transmit Internet over a wider area than a standard WiFi signal.

The technology is being developed through a National Science Foundation grant to the university, and Technology For All is assisting with testing efforts in Houston and Smithville. “This is a really exciting innovation in the way people can get Internet,” said Dees.

The team of students, consisting of graduate and undergraduate students involved in Electrical Engineering studies, set up the Super WiFi system at the local MS150 Internet Café Wrap-up

For the third year in a row, the BP MS 150 organizers called on Technology For All (TFA) to provide support in their two-day fundraiser - a cycling ride from Houston to Austin.

The BP MS 150, organized by the National MS Society: Lone Star, is a 180-mile biking journey from Houston to Austin to raise funds for Multiple Sclerosis research. In 2013, the MS 150 event raised more than $18.1 million for MS research, and in its history, raised over $185 million for MS research, programs and services.

On Saturday, April 12, TFA held its third Internet Café for the MS 150 cyclists and support staff.

Twenty laptops were set up outdoors under tents at the Fayette County Fairgrounds in La Grange - the halfway point and overnight stay between Houston and Austin. Riders enjoyed a much welcomed break and a chance to check their emails, post to their Facebook pages and charge their cell phones at the convenient and free internet café.

"Technology For All is happy to support the 30th annual BP MS 150”, said TFA CEO Will Reed. “Our staff and volunteers are devoted to improving the lives of people in our communities through the tools of technology. Opportunities like the Internet café allows us to give of our expertise in rapidly deploying mobile computer labs to assist communities where we work and live."

In addition to supporting the MS 150, Technology For All has provided mobile computer labs for the victims of the Bastrop, Texas wildfires of 2011 and for Hurricane Katrina evacuees. TFA regularly uses mobile labs to support our mission of training low-income and underserved persons to improve their education, employment and personal prospects.
high school football stadium bleachers. Using the stadium allowed the team to test the system without having to climb a water tower while getting the height needed to perform proper testing.

The Smithville ISD superintendent, Dr. Rock McNulty, paid the team a visit to see their work and ask questions. SISD is a TFA partner, working with the Houston-based organization on various technology projects and proposals. “This is exciting,” Dr. McNulty said, “We are happy to help.”

Smithville proved to be a good test site for the new technology, because of its rural area and availability of analog TV channels (called “white space”) to use. The team plans additional tests in the area, including a possible longer-term installation and test.

Rice University STEM Classroom Project

Middle school and high school students at Mission Milby CDC’s afterschool technology program got a taste of what engineering is all about on April 24.

Students saw a demonstration of the process for building a small DC Motor and they gained some hands-on experience in building a robotic device.

The activity was facilitated through a TFA and Rice University collaboration to bring the outreach event to Mission Milby CDC in Houston. The Rice students conducting the session are in the Wireless Networking for Under-Resourced Communities class, taught by Professor Edward Knightly, and they must fulfill a community involvement requirement.

The Rice students were successful in engaging the youth and providing them with more insight into Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) disciplines, particularly in the field of Engineering.

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