

## Mouseclicks 101 at Mark Skinner Library

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MANCHESTER - For years, there had always been someone else around to do the lifting when it came to using a computer.

But when the health and rehabilitation center she works for as a part-time nurse announced they would be moving to a more computer-based system for dispensing medication and other tasks that used to be handled by pen and paper, Helen Judd knew it was time to bite the bullet.

The Manchester resident signed up for a new one-on-one computer literacy class being offered at the Mark Skinner library. The main thing was getting over some fears about the computer itself and practice a few basic skills, she said.

"I didn't know anything about it and wasn't interested," she said. "Everyone around me did what I needed to

get done."

Outside of work, she wanted to learn how to send e-mail as well as surf the Web for information about medicine and health care. But it's not going to be all work and no play either. There are a few other purposes for which she hopes to put her new-found computer skills to good use.

"My first thing was - show me how to get to the Food Channel - I like to cook," she said, thinking about tapping into all those recipes that will be available online.

The library offered a similar program two years ago that was taught by a volunteer at the time, said Cindy Waters, the library's coordinator of adult programming services. The course was popular, and many of the library's customers, especially seniors, said it was a good way

to break through the mental barrier of learning to navigate their way around a computer with its occasionally bewildering cluster of icons, commands and programs.

"We saw there was a need, but as a one-on-one tutorial, not as a class," Waters said.

Enter Laura Henderson, a new part-time employee recently hired by the library. She agreed to take the project on and in the month or so since the tutorial has resumed, has her hands full helping her mostly retirement age or near there students unravel the mysteries of cyberspace.

Currently, she is working with about 14 people. A typical one-on-one session lasts about an hour, she said.

"I had no idea it was going to be needed so much, but it really is," she said.

Some are raw beginners who have never even turned on a computer by themselves. Others already have some working knowledge, and want to learn more advanced skills. Some even bring in their own laptops, she said.

The starting point is finding out what they already know or want to learn. For those who have never worked with a computer before, just getting them comfortable with the device, and learning how to use a hand held "mouse" to launch programs, is where things begin, she said.

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Success depends on really breaking it down step by step so that the mystery is stripped away and the process is made as simple as possible, she said.

"They all seem to leave happy, and that's what matters to me as long as they learn something," she said.

Across the state, as high speed Internet access becomes more widespread and is steadily integrated into daily life, classes for seniors or those the computer revolution passed by are becoming more prevalent and popular, said Helen Labun Jordan, the project director for the e-Vermont Community Broadband Project, a program of the Vermont Council on Rural Development.

Whether it's finding healthcare information, communicating online with other family members or any other of the multiplying purposes available online, seniors and have just as many needs and applications that can be satisfied once the barrier with using computers is breached, she said.

"If you haven't needed something for 75 years, it's easy to say you don't need it now," she said. "It's easy to become defeatist. But you shouldn't be."

While a sizable number of today's seniors didn't have the opportunity to learn about what he new technology offers when they were in school or starting off in the workforce, courses such as the one at Mark Skinner are springing up all over the state to offset that, she said.

In Helen Judd's case, one session was all she needed to overcome her original reluctance to get computer-savvy. At work, she expects she and the other nurses will get some formal training on how to use their new system, but now, at least, she isn't starting that process from square one, she said.

"At least now I know some of the verbiage," she said. "It (the tutorial sessions) gives people in my age group a little encouragement that it's possible."

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