

Seniors teaching seniors the world of computers

Abington-based program proves you're never too old for Facebook or Photoshop

By Erin Shannon
ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER

ABINGTON – Computer skills are not just for the young and the restless.

Marge Vierrarra sends emails, edits pictures, reads the news online and shows off her paintings on her Facebook page – and she is 85.

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Vierrarra, a Brockton resident, learned her computer skills from other seniors at the Senior Computer Learning Center in Abington.

The center found a new home at the

Abington Senior Center after a falling-out with Massasoit Community College last year.

The group of seniors, who volunteer and teach other seniors computer skills, had been holding classes at Massasoit from 1998 until last July, when the college wanted a new financial arrangement and the two parties parted ways.

At the time, the group was operating as a chapter of SeniorNet, a nonprofit nationwide company based in San Francisco. The Massasoit board of directors came to John Young, the group leader and instructor, and suggested the chapter merge with the college, meaning the funds it raises would go to the Massasoit general fund. The group didn't want to relinquish its funds so it broke away from the college.

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MARC VASCONCELLOS/THE ENTERPRISE

■ Karen Kelleher of Bridgewater watches a Photoshop demonstration on a projection screen during a computer class at the Abington Senior Center on Wednesday.

Seniors teaching seniors

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"We have great respect for the program," Laurie Maker, director of public relations at the college, said Wednesday when contacted by The Enterprise.

She said the agreement with the group was outdated and the program's terms and

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John Young
instructor

staff-time requirements were not acceptable to the college.

The group broke off from SeniorNet, which had linked them to the college, and started the Senior Computer Learning Center. After three months of looking for a new location, the group came to an agreement with the Abington Senior Center.

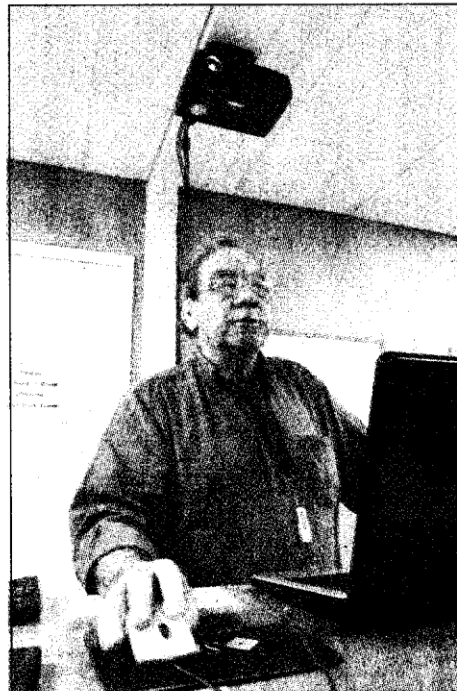
The senior center renovated what used to be a gym to equip it with plenty of space, power outlets and Internet service for the classes to be held there. The group brought 10 computers equipped with web cameras and printers they had purchased earlier through Massasoit. They have been hosting

classes there since October.

"There's a good turnout, and it's a great program," said David Klein, co-director of the center. "It's a whole new reason for people to come."

And people have turned out.

"I like it better here than Massasoit,"



■ Instructor John Young of Abington works with senior citizens during a computer class at the Abington Senior Center on Wednesday.

said Ray Sheffield of Brockton. "It's more informal here and there's better parking."

"It's the best deal going for seniors," said Young, of Abington. "A lot of us seniors get old and we get stuck in the house. The computer is a way to connect with the outside world."

The money raised through the classes goes toward paying a few hundred dollars a month to rent the room and keeping the computers and software up to date.

Ray uses what he learned through the classes to edit pictures and send emails.

"The computer is a hobby, it's fun," he said.

Bob Knowlton of Holbrook is glad the group separated from Massasoit.

"They wanted to change some of the times of the classes to night and us seniors don't drive much at night," he said.

Knowlton was hesitant to try learning the computer, but said learning from other seniors makes it easy.

"I check my emails every day before I leave the house," he said. "You can use Google for everything, but I used to think, if I tried I was going to break the thing."

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EXTRA

Go online to view more photos of the computer class at the Abington Senior Center

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