

Students at RPV's Tech Center Gain Competitive Edge

By Chris Boyd
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Setting up computers, loading software and installing hardware. Sound like tasks for a computer technician?

They are indeed tasks for computer professionals, but interns at the Palos Verdes on the Net Computer Technology Center in Rancho Palos Verdes are performing the same tasks to get a leg up on today's expanding technology.

"We have a zero-failure environment" says Ted Vegvari, owner and president of PV on the Net, who supports the center with funding from his company, PC Lab. "They cannot attempt to complete a task here without learning something."

In 1997 alone, the center, which celebrated its one year anniversary at the location next to RPV City Hall this October, has attracted about 100 interns. Many of them are students at Palos Verdes Peninsula High School who receive credit for hands-on training.

"For me, I don't know where I'd be without it," says Imran Ahmed, 17, a senior at Peninsula High.

Instead of sitting at his home computer, Ahmed is performing complex video editing at the center.

Many interns begin by answering phones and simply learning about the center, but they soon master computer programs and the intricacies of the Internet. Then it's on to things such as web page design and graphics skills.

Says Vegvari, "We very closely monitor what it is the students have an aptitude for and what they enjoy doing."

Working on Real-Life Projects

Because the center works with all of the city halls on the Peninsula,



interns assist city officials who call with computer software and hardware questions. "We train the interns using community service projects," Vegvari explains.

Students help with tasks such as reconfiguring and setting up computer systems, upgrading memory and removing failed hard drives at the center and at city sites.

Just recently, some of the interns actually set up the computer network at Hillside Chevron in Torrance.

In addition, they teach work-

shops for area students. Recently, two Peninsula High students explained computer technology to a group of 25 kids from Palos Verdes Intermediate School.

Vegvari says that the interns also have a chance to work with what he calls business environment technology, which includes programs the average computer user has not even seen.

For instance, the students have used a Windows '98 program, as well as video and audio editing programs, before the public knows about them. "We're even working with products that haven't been put on the market yet," Vegvari notes, adding, "They get to actually put it into use."

What does all of this learning mean for the interns? "It builds confidence in the students, it builds self-teaching ability," Vegvari stresses.

The intern program provides opportunities for learning teamwork as well. There is now a student board of directors to oversee specific tasks.

"After five or six months here, they're comfortable in working with teams," he says. "They're more comfortable explaining things to people."

Many students, who may have been loners attached to their computers at home, develop valuable social interaction skills.