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Computer Classes at Local Senior Centers Improve Seniors' Well-being

(Chester County) Now more than ever, millions of people around the world are using the Internet and computers every day. Still, many older adults are trying to make sense of this “new age” technology as they try to keep up with younger, more technologically savvy, generations.

Local area senior centers offer access to computers and the Internet, as well as a variety of computer classes at different levels to meet the needs of older adults and help them to stay up-to-date with today's technology. “There are many advantages of seniors knowing how to use the Internet,” said Theresa Sargent-Merkel executive director at the Coatesville Area Senior Center. “It allows them to do research on the effects of the medicines they are taking, learn about their options for supplemental insurance and keep up with their stocks and investments.”

However, the benefits of using the Internet for older adults can go beyond just staying current with the latest news and information. Recent studies have shown that Internet use can strengthen social bonds and create a sense of connectedness among older adults.

“Using a computer keeps seniors connected with their children and grandchildren, which can reduce feelings of isolation and ease loneliness,” said Mary Kline, program coordinator at the West Chester Area Senior Center.

In addition to the obvious emotional benefits, use of computers by seniors may also be linked to improved psychological well-being and fewer depressive symptoms. “Research has shown that the more we think, the better our brains will function – regardless of age. Using the Internet and reading, researching, and emailing all require mental stimulation,” explained Kline.

“I primarily use the computer to play my brain games,” said Joan Sullivan, member of the West Chester Area Senior Center. “The games challenge my brain and work my eye-hand coordination by using the mouse.”

Various computer classes are available for free or at a low cost to older adults at their local senior centers. Some of the classes offered include Learning How to Use Your Computer, Surfing the Internet, Internet Safety, Computer Maintenance Tips, and Electronic Mail at experience levels from beginner to advanced. These programs vary by center, but are all led by professionals who are experienced in the needs of older adults.

There are six senior centers in Chester County - Coatesville Area Senior Center, Downingtown Area Senior Center, Kennett Area Senior Center, Oxford Area Senior Center, Phoenixville Area Senior Center, and West Chester Area Senior Center. Each senior center is dedicated to supporting

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the independence and well-being of adults ages 60 and over. Each center provides an array of services and programs, including meals, age-appropriate exercise classes, educational workshops, and referral services. For more information about low-cost computer classes for older adults in your area, please go to www.ChesterCountySeniors.org and click on the center near where you live.

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Photo Caption: (L-R) Jean Morton and Barbara Gauff participate in a computer class workshop in the computer room at the West Chester Area Senior Center.