



Chapter Recycles Computers By Adri -Anne Trammell

The Sooner AMBUCS chapter in Norman, Oklahoma, between January 1998 and June 2001 has refurbished and given away, free of charge, over 1200 computers to adults and children with disabilities. This is a great project for a club of any size – we have 22 members – and successfully furthers the AMBUCS' mission of “creating independence for people with disabilities.”

Club members had been considering such a project when we met a wonderful woman, Linda Durbin. Linda was a busy mom and very active in her community when she was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in 1986. She has been confined to a wheelchair for many years but has not let the disease stop her from helping others. Linda learned about computers using Commodore systems. In 1995, a foundation gave Linda an IBM 286 computer. Her experience with that system was so positive, she decided to help others with disabilities obtain similar computers. She feels computers can keep those who are disabled from becoming isolated and letting depression take over.

One of her early computers was given away to a five-year old child with cancer. The look on the child's face and the joy it brought to him was all that was needed to confirm to her that this was the work she wanted to do. Over several years, starting back with Commodores, Linda was able to give away over 70 computers. She was hampered, however, by her lack of affiliation with a 501(c)(3) organization and her inability to provide tax receipts for donations.

Enter the Sooner AMBUCS. We met Linda in late 1997 and felt that with her experience and contacts plus our energy, resources, and tax advantage, this was a “marriage made in heaven.” In January 1998 we formed the ASK project; Linda soon joined the chapter and we all started working together. We only use IBM compatible systems, which range from old 268 systems to Pentium level systems. The very old machines can be fixed up and are used by Head Start programs to introduce children to computers. We provide 286 level systems to Learning

Disability labs in area schools. These computers feature shareware games and educational programs. We also provide these systems to children with learning and other disabilities to use at home. Machines with 386 and 486 processors go to older children and adults who need more capacity for schoolwork, record keeping, communication, and sometimes home-based businesses. We save our Pentium level machines for those who need voice recognition software – primarily individuals who are quadriplegic or blind.

Computers come from individuals, small and large businesses, and Government agencies. Linda and one of her relatives, Dale Starchman, handle every system, building systems using donated components, making small repairs, and setting them up to match specific recipient's needs and abilities. Other chapter members pick up systems, handle paperwork and storage, test and match up components, and distribute them to recipients. We rent two large truck trailers for storage after using garages at first.

We are working with the Mid-Day AMBUCS in Woodward, Oklahoma as they establish the ASK project in Northwestern Oklahoma. They even have volunteers provided by AmeriCorp helping. The ASK project is a lot of work but there is a great need out there to be filled. Financially, it is a very low-cost project, with our primary expense being the trailer rental donated at half price or \$100 a month. Most parts used for repairs are taken from other systems that aren't repairable. As we obtain additional funds, they are spent on special assistive devices and software needed by some recipients. We also would like to add modems to enable recipients to access the Internet and send and receive e-mail. Many of our computers are donated by businesses that use networks rather than modems for Internet access. For a homebound person, the ability to communicate with others is a blessing.

Computers are provided to individuals with disabilities throughout Oklahoma (and sometimes further away) and donations have come from as far away as Maryland and Illinois. We've grown every year as we've gained more experience; in the year 2000 we gave away 500 computers.

PEOPLE WE HELP

One time I picked up some computers from a man who owned an actuarial business. I was telling him that I had a little 10-year old boy with Cerebral Palsy in mind for

one of his donated computers. He got all misty-eyed and told me about his adult daughter with CP and how glad he was to know he was helping another child with CP.

And the mom I met with her 15 year old son who was paralyzed from the waist down...you would have thought we were giving him the moon and the stars. He was just thrilled and couldn't wait to get home and get his computer all hooked up.

Or the grandmother who had teenaged grandsons who were born with no pores in their bodies...no hair, no teeth, and they couldn't handle cold or heat. As they have to be indoors most of the time, the computers will be their lifelines to the world. We got them matching computers for Christmas.

There was a little 4-year old girl who received burns all over her body as the result of a gas can ignited by a hot water heater. She lost all her fingers and will have years of surgery and therapy to face as she gets older. But now she uses her knuckles to play computer games on a computer we gave to her.

Another mom was adopted 2 foster children who had suffered neglect and abuse in their short lives. We provided a computer for each child, ages 8 and 11, to help them overcome their multiple learning disabilities and catch up in school.

There was a 35-year old woman who had never been self-sufficient; her family had to help support her. We gave her a good computer, scanner, and printer and loaded it with sufficient software that she will be able to run a home-based business and contribute to her support.

Helping people like these makes all the work worthwhile. For more information on this project, contact Adri-Anne Trammell at (405) 360-1521 or Atrammell@mmcable.com.