

RINGWOOD

Education foundation plans to provide mobile computer lab

BY TIM FOX
Staff Writer

As one of the most renowned scientific minds ever known, Albert Einstein applied his intellect and mathematical reasoning to create an equation relating time and space, $E = MC$ squared.

Now, just over 100 years after Einstein first derived his theory of relativity, the Ringwood Education Foundation (REF) is applying the same equation to the borough school district to foster the development of young minds.

Their equation: education equals mobile computer cart.

The REF, a 15-member board dedicated to fundraising on behalf of the borough school system, unveiled its biggest and most far-reaching educational gift before a gracious board of education on Monday night.

It is currently researching and amassing funds for the acquisition of a wireless laptop computer cart that it plans to donate to Martin J. Ryerson Middle School, said REF president Denise Benson.

The REF has raised 2/3 of the approximate \$30,000 cost of the project and it's hoping to bring in additional funds through upcoming fundraising events, said Benson.

The long-term goal of the REF is to bring technology grants to the E.G. Hewitt, Robert Erskine and Peter Cooper elementary schools. The time frame for the grants is

directly related to the group's fundraising success. Benson said the optimistic goal is to possibly have the mobile computer cart ready for use by Sept. 2007.

The concept of the cart is a computer lab on wheels that can be conveniently utilized by all teachers to infiltrate technology into the classroom.

The cart will house the 28 plus laptops designed to meet the needs of the Ryerson student population, said REF board and technology committee member, Jean Speer.

The all-steel frame cart can hold and charge up to 30 laptops, which will provide wireless Internet access.

"It's a mobile media cart, capable of housing and recharging laptops when not in use, capable of transporting them from one location to another and capable of providing access to peripheral devices (such as a network printer, a projector and controlled internet access) all in one, convenient and portable location — the actual classroom where the learning happens," said Speer.

Furthermore, the cart would add computing capability into the classroom where, because of time constraints and limited number of machines, computers are often used as an afterthought for research and support instead of an integral part of the learning process, said Speer.

Barbara Pepe, REF secretary

and fifth grade teacher in the Wyckoff School District has used a computer cart in her classroom for several years.

Pepe pointed out that bringing computers into the classroom and making them more convenient to use will help meet the State Core Curriculum Content Standards, objectives provided by school districts with benchmarks for student achievement in nine content areas, including technology literacy.

According to the standards for technological literacy, computer and information literacy, which supports skills in information gathering, information organizing and problem solving, has become critical for every student whether college- or work-bound.

"If you look at the standards, with technology in the work force, kids are expected to do those things," said Pepe. "So we're really excited to bring this to Ryerson and hopefully in the future to bring it to Hewitt and the elementary level."

The board of education has sought to bring laptops into the school system for several years, but has seen their efforts curtailed by the constraints of a tight budget.

Consequently, board members were delighted with the work and generosity of the REF, which has raised over \$127,000 for the district.

Teachers and administrators

alike were thankful and excited to have the gift as well. Jen Bariso, media specialist at Ryerson, is in charge of a computer lab at the library and believes the cart will make computers more available to students.

(According to Speer, the project will just about double the current computing capacity for Ryerson students.)

"I teach four classes a day in the lab so scheduling is constantly a problem," said Bariso. "Having this form of technology here will add a wealth of opportunities to the teachers and students. I think it's nothing but a huge asset."

"If (students) have the computers right in front of them, they are able to be interactive with them," said Katherine Cuneo, a teacher at Ryerson. "It really instills a love of learning with the students and they're going to get more excited about learning, whether it's science or math or just even doing the research."

To continue its fundraising, the REF is sponsoring a murder mystery dinner and silent auction on March 3 to be held at the Cupsaw Clubhouse in Ringwood. Money raised from the event will go directly toward helping the REF meet its goal of improving technology in the schools. Tickets are \$45 and can be reserved by calling Barbara Pepe at 973-962-7349.

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