

STORIES OF IMPACT

HOW BROADBAND CHANGED MY LIFE



FutureGenerations Rural America



In 2010, the Future Generations launched the West Virginia Broadband Opportunities Program to make computers and the Internet more accessible and useful to West Virginia's families. With support from the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, this program has set up 60 public computer centers in the community hubs of local volunteer fire departments and rescue squads across the state.

Access to high-speed Internet service is no longer a luxury for rural communities. Increasingly, it's a necessity for basic activities such as searching for a job, enhancing education, accessing healthcare technologies, and staying in touch with family and friends. Like water, roads, and electricity, Broadband is fundamentally important to the social and economic development of the state.

Future Generations is honored to be on the cutting edge of delivering the benefits of Broadband to some of the most rural communities in West Virginia. Through this journey, we have gathered many stories and anecdotes along the way. These passionate voices tell true stories of how Broadband access has made a difference in the mentors' lives and the lives of their center patrons.

Future Generations will continue to promote the development of sustainable Broadband adoption across West Virginia and eventually on to other parts of rural America. We look forward to this new and exciting digital age.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "LeeAnn Shreve".

LeeAnn Shreve
Director,
Future Generations Rural America

When Future Generations introduced the Broadband Opportunities program to my local fire department, I really didn't understand all that it was going to offer. I took over the lab after another mentor left and began to reintroduce myself to various computer programs, as well as learning a completely new and different computer operating system-LINUX. I have heard a lot about the program from various organizations and in books I've read, but I was terrified that I would never be able to learn it. I never imagined I would actually teach other people the basic skills of LINUX.

I have had several patrons in the computer center over the course of the last year and a half, and I have not only been able to help them learn something new but learned something from them in return. We take a lot of things for granted each day but knowing how to use a computer never crossed my mind as being a gift, as I am sure it doesn't to most of the other mentors. I have had people come in with very basic skills and

ask minimal questions and I have had other come in with a lot of computer knowledge who want to use their own laptops to conduct business quietly.

These patrons usually make my job very easy, and I should be grateful for that, but the patrons I enjoy the most are the ones who come in and ask me, "Please don't laugh at me and I am really kind of embarrassed to ask you this, but would you show me how to turn this darn thing on?" I know we all like to feel like we are needed at times, but I personally think that is one of the greatest experiences I have had in this program. We learned how to turn the computer on, set up accounts, check e-mails, and even how to do a little social networking on the-all-so-famous Facebook. That patron spent several weeks with me and became more and more comfortable every day she came.

I haven't seen that patron for a while, because she was communicat-

Melanie Whetzel

Upper Tract Volunteer Fire Department

ing with her daughter from another state just fine by e-mail and also taking the online courses that Future Generations offers. Living in a small town though, I do occasionally see this lady in the local grocery store and I usually get a big smile and a "hi," along with a "guess what I did on my computer last week!?" I also still receive a phone call from her once in a while saying, "Oh my gosh, my computer screens say this and I don't know what to do now, can you help?" Sometimes I can help her directly and sometimes I have to call someone else in to help, but we usually get it all worked out. I can honestly say that I consider her a friend and I hope we will continue our friendship for many years to come.

I also consider this one of my greatest Broadband moments as well as a true, life lesson!



“ I have had several patrons in the computer center over the course of the last year and a half, and I have not only been able to help them learn something new but learned something from them in return. ”

Ashley Dyer

Richwood Volunteer Fire Department

When the Richwood Volunteer Fire Department Computer Lab opened at the end of October 2011, I was in my first semester of college with seventeen credit hours—one class of which was an online English course. I was at home for my first year at college at the Nicholas County Campus of New River Community & Technical College. I found the computer center helpful for completing my work and it made taking an online course easier with high-speed Internet and all the different resources on the computers (i.e. Open Office Word).

When I finished my online course in December 2011, I decided to take more online classes and signed up for four more online classes. I do not have access to high-speed Internet at home, so you can imagine what a blessing it was to have the center when I couldn't get the slower Internet at home to work quite right. I feel like having access to high-speed Internet helped me do so much more in my first year of college.



Broadband Internet has provided our community members and patrons with high-speed Internet. It has also provided community members and patrons with access to a computer if: they do not have a computer, their computer is out of service, or they just want to use Internet that is faster than dial-up.

One computer center patron uses the computer center to keep in contact with family and friends in her home state shortly after moving to Brandywine while she waited for her own Internet to be hooked up. The computer center also provides patrons and community members with access to Facebook and e-mail at a

faster speed, which is a time-saver in this high paced life we live in. Educational classes are offered to the patrons and community members (including myself). We are able to access a large number of programs, websites, job-search engines, store coupons for local shops, newspapers, and even a few online college courses.

Being a mentor has been a learning experience for myself. I have become more self-confident and have met a lot of wonderful new friends at the trainings we attend. I also enjoyed the extra stipend we get as a mentor,

Nila Bland

South Fork Volunteer Fire Department

which I used for special projects at the center., which I used for special projects. The computer center offers many lessons and websites on economic opportunity and disaster preparedness.

The labs were particularly useful during the recent storm disaster.

Our fire department was able to be open the center for patrons and community members to check on friends and family members in other areas. They were fortunate enough to have a back-up generator.

“ I do not have access to high-speed Internet at home, so you can imagine what a blessing it was to have the center... Having access to high-speed Internet helped me do so much more in my first year of college. ”



Banks District Volunteer Fire Department began their quest to become involved with Future Generation Graduate School in August 2011. The graduate school's staff made a presentation to the department at the fire department's regular meeting in September 2011. The department liked the idea of opening a computer center in the building. After a very successful open house in October, they opened the computer center to the public on November 3, 2011. With the general goal of helping the community grow, the computer center began operating 10 hours per week.

Trying to accommodate job schedules, school schedules, and day-time patrons' schedules, the center established a schedule to be available to the community: Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and Tuesday and Friday from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. These hours also worked well with scheduled community meetings of local groups that meet at the fire department, such as Southern Upshur Business Association, CEO's, Stargazer's Garden Club, Upshur County Fair, Fiddler's Mill Historical Society, Tri-County Health

Sharon Bonnett

Banks District Volunteer Fire Dept.

Clinic. The computer center is used by diverse age groups, economic levels, and educational backgrounds.

Many in our community do not have access to Broadband, high-speed Internet. Our computer center gives them the opportunity to "surf the world." The patrons' skill levels range from none to expert. Our center tries to accommodate the individual need, whether it is learning to turn on the computer, learn new software, search for car parts, do a job search, set up and manage e-mail accounts, study for exams, follow family on Facebook, and use Ebay.

The computer center is a place the community can come together to work and play. We, at Banks District Volunteer Fire Department, salute the staff and administration of Future Generations Graduate School for giving us the opportunity to make such a huge difference in the lives of so many people.

“Many in our community do not have access to high-speed Internet. Our computer center gives them the opportunity to ‘surf the world.’ The patrons’ skill levels range from none to expert.”

Joyce Johnson

Big Otter Volunteer Fire Department

The first thing he said when he walked into our lab was “I don’t think I can be taught, but I’d like to look at a computer. I’ve never touched one, don’t even know how to turn one on, much less use it.” I replied with, “Of course you can learn to use one! If you can read, you can use a computer!” He cleared his throat and was silent for a moment. In my mind, I’m kicking myself and yelling, “Oh my gosh, I just stuck my foot in my mouth!! But, YIKES what do I do if he CAN’T read?!” When he spoke, he said “Oh I can read,” a wave of relief swept over me—it didn’t matter what he said next), “but I only have a fifth-grade education. Do you still think I can do it?” I assured him we could teach him, and so we began.

The first few times he was here, we just looked at things he wanted to see, such as information on the knives he collects and other items similar to what he makes with his woodworking skills.

Little by little, we started showing him how things worked – things he could see and do until he was ready to try it all on his own. He used the “hunt-and-peck” style of typing, occasionally having to ask for help in spelling something.

Sometimes he forgot his password and username, but he was off to the fascinating world of the Internet! He still sometimes needed our help as he traveled this new journey, but he was loyal and determined to learn. For a

few months, he was in our lab every time the doors opened, staying an entire 5 hours and sometimes never leaving his chair. He asked questions, which sometimes had me scrambling to find the absolute right answers to. He took notes and listened to online sites to learn as much as he could.

Then he truly was on his own. He



had gone from never seeing a computer up close, to surfing the web like a pro. After much discussion and online research, he bought his own laptop (even though he does not have high-speed service at home yet) and a cell phone, so he could have Internet access. He is an online shopper now; he uses the Internet to check on competitive prices for items he makes in his woodworking, and has bought parts he needed to finish work on antiques of various kinds. He has found new projects to make and repair things he has “lay-

ing around the farm”. He learned to use our printer so that when he saw something online he liked or wanted to make, he’d print it out to take home to study so that he could duplicate whatever it was.

He has e-mail and Facebook accounts. Through Facebook, he has reconnected with distant friends and relatives he hasn’t had contact with in years. It was truly exciting to watch his face as he found pictures of some them and hear him exclaiming about how much they’ve changed through time. We don’t see him in the center much now, but he does drop in from time to time. He says he takes his phone and laptop with him when he goes anywhere, “because you never know where

you can pick up free Wi-Fi service and be online.” Every now and then, he can be seen late evenings, when his workday is done, sitting in his old truck at the center’s parking lot with that laptop using our wireless to search for something online. The Internet truly broadened this man’s world and still fascinates him daily – not to mention has helped him market his collections of his beautiful woodwork and helped him find forgotten friends and family. If the computer center does nothing else, his story is our success.

“ He is an online shopper now; he uses the Internet to check on competitive prices for items he makes in his woodworking and has bought parts he needed to finish work on antiques of various kinds. ”

Last August, I decided to leave my dial-up service and upgrade to a faster connection to the Internet. Living rurally, my decision to upgrade was based on the Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Since the telephone company had not completed their infrastructure for DSL, I decided to use Hughesnet.com. HughesNet.com's service varies with the weather. If it is heavily overcast the speed of communication is sharply diminished. If it is snowing, cleaning the snow off of the dish is necessary to receive service. It also limits your Internet usage. If you use more than your limit, you are penalized for the next 24 hours with a speed as slow as dial-up. Sometimes they have trouble with their satellites and service becomes slow and spotty.

Sharon Bonnett, a mentor at the Banks District Volunteer Fire Department, told me of their Broadband Computer Center. I signed up immediately. Whenever I need to download information or need extensive computer time, I go to Rock Cave and use their Broadband Internet. What a treat! The Broadband Internet is excellent and the atmosphere at the computer center is pleasant and helpful. I no longer have to worry about my limited Internet usage at home. The speed of downloads at the center is far greater and consistent than what my computer can do at home.

Another positive aspect of using the computer center has been my involvement with the community of

Deana Smith

Banks District Volunteer Fire Dept.

Rock Cave.

I use the local IGA grocery store more often, spending money locally instead of running to Buckhannon. Sharon Bonnett also involved me in the Youth Technology Camp at the computer center. I will be teaching the first two classes on photography and then help throughout the week of class. I was a professional photographer for more than 30 years and it feels good knowing I will help my younger neighbors learn the art and technology of photography. So, in many ways, the availability of Broadband Internet has broadened my life.

Kim Davis

Flatwoods Volunteer Fire Department

Being a part of this Broadband opportunity has been a wonderful experience. Not only have I had the opportunity to teach computer skills to individuals who would not have otherwise had the chance to learn these skills, but I've also had the opportunity to share a part of myself with others. I am a teacher and love teaching. Being a mentor at a computer center has given me another opportunity to do what I love to do.

One of the best experiences I have had is teaching the Youth Technology Camp. Being able to work with young people and teach them about Broadband and all the ways it can be used to find information, play educational games (learning while having fun), and learning how to use programs to make their lives easier has been fun and exciting for me. Most important to me is the fact that it has improved my relationship with my own children. We have spent many hours at the computer lab. Spending this time with my children has been wonderful. My

children have expanded their computer skills and even taught me some things about the computer I did not know.

Part of being a productive member of society is serving others. Having a computer center and being able to share Broadband Internet and my knowledge with others in my community has made me a better person. I am blessed to have had the opportunity to be a member of this wonderful experience.



“The Broadband Internet is excellent and the atmosphere at the computer center is pleasant and helpful. I no longer have to worry about my limited Internet usage at home.”

Brenda Wilson

Summers County Volunteer Fire Dept.

The impact the computer center has had in Summers County is tremendous. Many people who have never owned a computer before have stopped by with their laptops to learn how to set up an email or create an account on Facebook. Living in a rural community does not seem so bad if you have Broadband access. One patron came to the computer center and explained to me that he was retired from a local company and that he and his wife dedicated their lives to raising their two grandchildren.

The eldest grandchild graduated from high school and was accepted into the Army. This grandchild was stationed in Fort Benning, Georgia. The gentleman had received a letter from his grandson, explaining that photographers were at the mili-

tary training facility taking pictures and posting them on Facebook. The gentleman was determined to learn how to get on Facebook and see his grandson while in training.

The gentleman did not have a computer at home and so he stopped by the center every day it was open.

He first learned how to create an e-mail account and took basic computer skills courses. He wanted to purchase his own laptop, but was concerned about the price. When we informed him of the refurbished computers for sale, he pulled out his checkbook and purchased one on the spot.

Within days of that, he had called his local Broadband Internet provider and had it installed in his home. We would email one another, just to make sure he was on the right track.

Soon, he had set up his Facebook account during another visit at the

center. Together we found the Facebook page for his grandson's squad-rant. We searched for his pictures and I sent a request to the photographer for pictures specifically of this gentleman's grandson. When the grandfather came to the center the next day, we had found some pictures of his grandson. That was truly a good day for me – the smile on his face was priceless. The grandfather wrote to his grandson explaining how he could now see his pictures on Facebook, thanks to a computer center in the local fire department.

This gentleman and I are now friends on Facebook too. It is a great feeling knowing that I had helped him find his grandson in boot camp. His grandson even stopped by the center and thanked me. Broadband makes the world a smaller and more enjoyable place. Thank you Future Generations for this opportunity.

I am a 60-year-old grandma with grandchildren and children in 2 other states. I keep up with their daily lives and even get to see soccer and dance pictures through Broadband Internet. This is truly a blessing, since my husband cannot travel or be left alone for long periods of time for me to visit them.

Last month, an older woman dropped some stuff in the grocery line and her purse spilled all over the floor. As I helped her pick her

things up, I noticed several pictures and asked her about them. She explained they were her grandchildren and how she never saw them anymore because of health and financial problems. I explained about the computer center and how Broadband Internet might help her.

The following Wednesday, she was at the computer center. Although she did not want to learn much and was pretty petrified of the computer, I

Jean Bleigh

Flatwoods Volunteer Fire Dept.

did get her on Facebook and showed how she could see all the newest pictures of her grandchildren. She even talked to them via chat, even though I typed it out for her.

She has been back once more since then, and I am sure she will get the hang of it soon! I am planning on her coming at least once a month. Hur-ray for brave seniors!

“When the grandfather came to the center the next day, we had found some pictures of his grandson [on Facebook]. That was truly a good day for me – the smile on his face was priceless.”

When the couple walked into my computer center, I could tell they were nervous and maybe a little afraid. Both were hard working people: she was a schoolteacher and he had been a bricklayer & tile-setter for all his life. His back was slightly bowed and his hands were hard from his work. The man looked unsure as he explained his situation: he could no longer continue in his line

of work, as his body could no longer take the physical abuse. He had been offered a good job with a large company, but his biggest fear was that they wanted him to have basic computer knowledge when he didn't even know how to turn one on. "Can you help me?" he asked. I told him, "without a doubt." I could see in his eyes that he wanted to help himself.

I helped him sign in, take our sur-

vey, started him on basic computer classes. Then he went on to take a typing class. What a joy it was the day he and his wife popped back in and said, "He got the job! He got the job! Thank you so much!" His wife is still a patron of our center and almost every time I see her, she smiles and gives me and unspoken "thank you."

Paul Beatty

Flatwoods Volunteer Fire Department

Jim and Carolyn were taking their first big trip driving all the way to the Great Northwest to take an Alaskan cruise. "Can you help us?" they asked. I signed them up and started them on a basic computer course. Every time they came to the center, I would help them plan their trip through the wonders of Broadband Internet.

We found hotels, restaurants, and even sights for them to see along the way. They were amazed that they could do all of that from a computer. We even printed their boarding passes and planned a different route home, booking a bed and breakfast and checking the price of gas along the way. They were simply astounded that a computer could access the world.

One day as they came into the center, excitedly showing me their new laptop and asked if I could help them set it up. Jim is a local businessman, so I showed him how he could check prices and order things online. It made me feel good to open up this whole new world to him.

Jim and Carolyn went on their trip and I got to see the pictures that I helped them put on their computer. Jim's business has moved into the 21st century.

This is just another day at the center—making people's lives better and easier. To me, that's a success.



“ Jim is a local businessman... I showed him how he could check prices and order things online. It made me feel good to open up this whole new world to him. ”

Kim Davis

Flatwoods Volunteer Fire Department

My story is not about me, but about my daughter. Kourtney is a bright, independent 15-year-old. She decided she wanted a PlayStation 3 and she worked to earn the money to purchase one. Unlike most adults who would go to a local store and buy one, Kourtney began to search the Internet to find the best deal. She finally found one: it was used, and from a pawn shop, but she felt it was safe to purchase. .

She anticipated the arrival of her purchase all week. When the PlayStation finally arrived, she was anxious to hook it up and begin playing online games with her friends. When she hooked it up and tried a disc, it got stuck. It would not play, nor would the door open to remove the disc.

So, what did my internet-savvy daughter do? She began searching the Internet for a solution to her problem. She found someone who had experienced the same problem on the PlayStation and a video showing how to repair the problem. When I walked into my living room and saw her PlayStation in several pieces my first thought was, "well, she has done it now. She will never get this thing put back together, let alone working." Kourtney, however, was confident in her abilities and within 45 minutes had repaired her PlayStation and was playing games online. The lesson to her mom was: Broadband can turn even a 15-year-old girl into a system analysis and repair woman.



As a child, my single mother worked night shift as an LPN in our local hospital. I stayed with my recently widowed grandmother most of the time. Around the age of 5 (in 1998) having a computer and Internet in your home started sounding a little more familiar. Soon after, my uncle, Ken Allman, created a website called PracticeLink. It started off slow, but still made a tiny bit of profit.

As time went on, the company began to increase with business, therefore increasing my uncle's stress and responsibilities. He then reached out to my mother for help. He began to teach her about business and soon she was able to quit her job at the hospital to become the manager of PracticeLink.

PracticeLink is now a thriving online physician recruitment company employing well over 15 people. Extending PracticeLink is a company called MountainPlex; which is co-owned by PracticeLink. MountainPlex is a company that owns other businesses such as MountainPlex Lawn care, The Guest House Inn, and The Market on Courthouse Square, which also employs far more than 15 people. In short, Internet helped a wise man create more than 30 jobs.

Sara Beth Mattis

Summers Co Volunteer Fire Department

“Broadband can turn even a 15-year-old girl into a system analysis and repair woman.”

At Flatwoods, we have had two Youth Technology Camps. We were so pleased to have a full camp this year. The most amazing part of camp is the interest and ability of these children. We could all take a lesson from them. Although we offer lots of different projects, we

Jean Bleigh Flatwoods Volunteer Fire Dept.

also offer healthy snacks. For some of these children, that was a most appreciated gift. When offering a camp like this, we need to remember that we are not only teaching but of-

fering them dreams, goals, and a little sustenance (which may not always be available in their homes). Teaching them to look up ideas and to explore on Broadband is our goal, but a little bonding and praise is also part of the Tech Camp experience.



When the Upper Tract Volunteer Fire Department, in partnership with Future Generations, opened the computer center in Upper Tract, I really didn't have a lot of interest in the project. After my wife became the mentor and I later became a volunteer mentor as well, I started really getting interested in the program. I have learned many things about computers, and I have increased my confidence in both computer usage and in public speaking. Most importantly though, this program has brought me closer to my 16-year-old son.

My son joined the Upper Tract Fire Department when he was 15-years-old as a junior member; he literally lives and breathes fire-fighting. At

his age, he can only really take training courses, he cannot actually perform any duties on a fire scene.

When my son and I discovered the fire fighting courses and trainings on the Future Generations website, we were thrilled. We have completed a lot of them together and often discuss them at other times.

When our chief started putting online courses for our department to take for our insurance company, it was another way to spend time with my son, discussing something we both really enjoy. I think we have probably made unforgettable memories that will be long-lasting.

I feel I owe a lot to Broadband – it

Tim Whetzel Upper Tract Volunteer Fire Department

has truly enriched our lives.

After spending so much time at the computer center and really getting into all that the Internet offers, we signed up for high-speed Internet at home. Until now, I didn't think we really needed it. It seems like once you get used to having Internet, it becomes a must. I just wish more people would utilize the computer center, because it is a wonderful opportunity that these fire departments/rescue squads and Future Generations are offering. There is so much out there to learn and enjoy with Broadband.

“After spending so much time at the computer center... we signed up for high-speed Internet at home. Until now, I didn't think we really needed it. It seems like once you get used to having Internet, it becomes a must.”

Broadband Internet impacted my life when my son was serving the U.S. in Afghanistan. It was during this time that I could not have appreciated Broadband more--it was the single most appreciated aspect of my life. I was able to keep tabs on all the news from his surroundings as well as stay in constant contact with him. I was also very thankful for Broadband Internet during this time, as he was able to Skype with his wife

and watch the many changes taking place in his baby, my first and only grandchild, who was only 8 days old when he left and slightly over a year old when he returned. Broadband is a very vital source of communication utilized by each member of our country's Armed Forces.

Unfortunately, many of these members are from very rural areas, where Broadband is not yet available; therefore, making it more difficult

to share streaming videos or other media with family and friends over dial-up Internet. It is my desire to see Broadband Internet available in every household across the U.S.. This should be among the top priorities in the national budget. When a service member is deployed to a foreign land to serve, the sacrifice of departure is made by an entire family and Broadband Internet would ease that burden.

Paul "Joey" McDaniel Bradley-Prosperity Fire Department

In order for one to fully understand and appreciate the story of how Broadband has positively affected my life, I must first give a little background of my family. A very loving couple that had already raised 7 of their own children and was volunteering with DHHR as Foster Parents for other children adopted me at 10 months old. They informed the social workers that if the right opportunity came about, they would consider adopting again. That opportunity came through for

them and approximately 16 months later, they also had the opportunity to adopt my half-sister.

This is something I am thankful for everyday of my life and don't regret the care I was able to render to both of them until their passing. I recall their 50th anniversary in 1987, where more than 200 guests were present--most of whom were either children, grandchildren, or great-grandchildren.

Since I was the youngest in that family of seven, more than just more

than just brothers and sisters, but also their families raised me too. If Broadband Internet had not been part of my life, I would have lost contact with most of them. My brother just recently learned of a granddaughter he never knew existed and Broadband Internet assisted him in getting to know her. We have had an annual reunion since 2002, and Broadband Internet has been instrumental in the organization of that event as well. We even have our own family Facebook page!

When I first started this journey with Future Generations, I thought it would be good money and that was it. The money helped me send my only child through college. Now that the Broadband Program is coming to its last year, my son is in his last year of college. So I guess I can say that Future Generations was with him all the way through.

This program has also brought my husband and I closer together. All of the great trips this program allowed us to take gave us a lot more time to spend together. We shared more laughs and connected again.

I have also gained new friends, not only through program trainings, but also in my own community. There are some that I will have as friends all my life. For that alone, I will always be grateful to Future Generations for giving me the opportunity to enrich my life for the years to come. And now, everyone is a Facebook friend with me! Thank you Future Generations for the Broadband Opportunities Program.

Dorothy Preston Matewan Volunteer Fire Department

“ I have also gained new friends, not only through program trainings, but also in my own community. There are some that I will have as friends all my life. ”

When I first took the job as mentor of the computer center, I wasn't what you would call shy. I wasn't what you would call outgoing either--I did what I had to do and nothing more. I took the mentor position for the fire company to help them out. Little did I know how much I would learn and grow from doing this. I had been doing the mentor job for several months when I decided that, in order to serve my patrons best, I was going to go to college. At that time, everything I knew about computers was self-taught. I had never had any computer classes in high school, as computers were just becoming a big thing when I graduated. I found an online college and began taking "Computer Science & Technology" courses. Taking these classes online gave me the opportunity to use Broadband.

Working in the computer center gave me the chance to meet several people who have become a part of my Broadband experience. From teaching patrons how to use the computer for the first time to helping them send important documents to loved ones in other countries, watching them grow from beginners to experts with the computer and Internet has been a trip of a lifetime.

Let me begin by telling you about the one who touched me the most. As I said before I was taking online computer classes, but I was getting frustrated with them. I felt like I

wasn't learning the things I wanted to know. At times I wanted to just quit. Then came Robert Hite. Mr. Hite was an 81-year-old man who decided to come in and learn how to use a computer. When he first started coming, he would bring his best friend also, an elderly man who had "Agent Orange" from his service to our country. They both were very eager to learn; they seemed ready to absorb the information that I was showing them.

Mr. Hite had me take pictures of the keyboard for him to take home and study for the next class. He went from not knowing anything about computers to buying his own laptop and becoming pretty good with using a computer and the Internet. He learned how to use Skype so he could talk to his granddaughter and great-granddaughter online. Mr. Hite made me realize you have to want to learn before you can learn anything.

I did much better in my studies for that year and even made the Dean's List. The next exceptional patron that came to the center made me realize how much we, as Americans, have to be thankful for. One day, while sitting in my lab wishing someone would come in so I would have someone to talk to, a lady came into the center. I could tell she wasn't from the USA just by looking at her and she wanted to know if I could help her.

She told me through broken English she needed to send some papers to her husband. As we began talking, I found out that the lady was here in the United States on Asylum and that her husband and children were still in Ethiopia where she had fled from and was fighting to get her family brought

Shirley Warner

Moorefield Volunteer Fire Company

to the US. I helped her scan and email her important documents to her family and in ten minutes, her husband called to say he had gotten them. She was so happy that I had helped her.

Without the benefits of Broadband, I could have never taken online classes, as the traditional classroom is not for me. I could have never shown Mr. Hite the new world beyond his living room, and I could have never helped the lady from Ethiopia get important documents to her family in minutes. Watching the lives of people who come in to use the computer center change has been so amazing, and I really hate to see it end.

It has helped me grow so I can stand in front of people now and teach them how to discover where their family came from in through the genealogy courses. I am so thankful for this opportunity.

“Watching the lives of people who come in to use the computer center change has been so amazing.”



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CONNECTING AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES

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