

St. Anthony's, Network Ministries creating big tech lab

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lar class — Internet searching, Web design, e-mail techniques and blog building. Individual tutoring is available, too, a couple of Saturdays a month. In an average week, 25 to 35 people come to the center.

"For drop-in times, we let people use the computer for an hour and a half, so there's almost always a wait," Bailey said. "The new lab should help that." The kids' program, which operates upstairs, will remain at the old site.

The goal for the lab, Bailey said, is to have 20 computers for drop-ins, 15 for classes, and about eight for staff and volunteers.

Over at St. Anthony's Learning Center at 55 Jones, up to 40 people a day get trained in basic computer skills. They must attend an orientation and meet weekly with an advisor to encourage practical applications — learning to send e-mails, navigate the Internet, and use Word and Excel to help them pass the GED and for employment purposes.

"For those who show aptitude and interest, we select eight people a semester to join a 20-hour-a-week intensive internship program," Robillard said. "About 40 people have completed the 18-week training since we started in 2001."

Interns learn to repair and maintain desktop computers and, when they're done, get an A+ certification, the industry standard for computer technicians.

The new joint computer lab will have an area set aside for the interns' work stations, which must include space for a working computer as well as testing equipment and the computer being repaired.

In a pilot program, St. Anthony's intern program gets 10 computers a week from Goodwill, which recycles two million pounds of electronic waste a year. It cherry-picks the most fixable computers and passes them on to St. Anthony's.

"After the interns fix them, eight or so computers go back to Goodwill to sell, and we donate the other two to nonprofits that request them," Robillard said.

Once the lab is open, St. Anthony's will continue its on-site basic computer skills training for agency clients. "The difference will be if someone comes to us and just wants to drop in or wants a more informal class, we'd send them over to the lab," Robillard said. "It will work the other way, too. People who've dropped in at the lab but want more education or case management can be referred to St. Anthony's."

Network Ministries and St. Anthony's envision their capacious lab — at least 3,000 square feet — with more than a huge bank of computers and printers. Ideally, it also will have a digital projector and screen, scanner and copy machine. ■



PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Chairs are always filled during drop-in hours at S.F. Network Ministries' Computer Training Center.

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