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Pitt to Endow LIS Chair

The **University of Pittsburgh** has received a \$1.5 million gift from the Buhl Foundation to establish an endowed chair in Library and Information Science in Pitt's School of Information Science (SIS).

Named in honor of Doreen Boyce, the Buhl Foundation's president, the Doreen E. Boyce Chair in Library and Information Science is one of the very few chairs established specifically for library and information science in the nation and the first chair in Pitt's SIS.

SIS Dean **Toni Carbo** says a search is likely to begin in the spring to identify a scholar to hold the chair.

Seniors Online: PVC Chapter Volunteers to Help

by Trudi Bellardo Hahn

As ASIS members are well aware, one of the biggest cultural, economic and educational developments of the 1990s has been the explosive growth of the Internet and, especially, the World Wide Web. We know that virtually every sector of society has been impacted, and the rate of adoption and use has been nothing but phenomenal. However, not all groups have had equal opportunity of access; senior citizens and retirees have been among those who have lagged behind. Only a privileged few seniors have the money for equipment and access, the technical background to set it up and maintain it, and a relative or friend to show them how to use it.

For most seniors, the reality is that many roadblocks stand in the way of getting on the information superhighway. The barriers include economics (how will they pay for computers, modems, Internet accounts?), maintenance (how will they troubleshoot the hardware and software problems that inevitably arise after a system is installed?), training (if they are not working or going to school, how will they learn to use the Internet?) or mental blocks and poor motor skills (how can they overcome fear and suspicion of computers, lack of typing skills, failing eyesight, weak hand control or other disabilities?).

The **Potomac Valley Chapter** of ASIS has a history of fund-raising and using chapter funds for projects other than just newsletters and programming, specifically to support outreach programs that benefit the general community. In this tradition, the Executive Board of PVC in 1997 authorized the expenditure of chapter funds to purchase a state-of-the-art computer and large monitor. They donated the equipment and a subscription to an Internet Service Provider to the seniors living at St. Mary's Court, an independent living facility in downtown Washington, DC. St. Mary's Court is HUD-subsidized and ethnically mixed. A few of the residents work part-time, but most are retired. Nearly all have very limited incomes.

Four PVC members (**Ione Auston, Trudi Bellardo Hahn, Clare Imholz and Kathleen Mullen**) volunteered to provide the technical support and training. Trudi prepared written materials, Kathleen and her husband installed the computer and Ione obtained the loan of a laser printer from the National Library of Medicine and installed it. Beginning in the fall of 1997, the four volunteers took turns visiting St. Mary's Court to provide training in using the Web and assisting residents in setting up free Juno e-mail accounts.

The training mainly took the form of informal coaching, with a few directions on how to surf the Web and use JUNO e-mail and a few hints and tricks. The primary mode of teaching, however, was to sit back and watch while the seniors took turns on the computer themselves. In spite of their physical limitations in eyesight and hand control, which made the keyboarding process slow and laborious, they grasped the principles of the Web browser quickly. Soon they were clicking on links, typing in URLs, jumping forward and back and saving bookmarks. The volunteers suggested topics and sites to explore, but often the seniors had their own notions of where they wanted to go on the Web, to places we never could have anticipated. For example, one Spanish-speaking senior wanted to read about the ancient Incan capital, Macchu Picchu. We showed her how to specify Spanish-language only and enter the terms in a search engine (with several false starts on the spelling). Soon she was happily examining historic photographs of the archeological ruins of the lost city.

Recently, we polled the participating seniors at St. Mary's Court about how they felt about our outreach project, and these comments were among the responses:

Wilbert enjoyed finding the "Postcards from the Beach" site and will be visiting the Virtual Florist next.

Hakela has mastered e-mail and says she feels like a graduate from preschool to kindergarten when she surfs the Web.

Joan wonders what she did before ASIS donated the computer, and will be eternally grateful for their generosity. Between e-mailing friends as well as foes (government officials) and exploring unknown territory on the Net, there is little time left for serious mischief!

Paul is a recent arrival on the computer; he will be joining online chess games a few lessons from now.

Josie, who was ill this summer, was looking forward to a new round of classes as her health improved.

Laura and Barbara were thrilled to find bridge lessons on the Web; now they can join the St. Mary's Court Bridge Club.

Cecile was sure she would hate the computer and she almost did not bother trying . . . but "now I LOVE IT!" She corresponds with her son in Florida, reads the online newspapers from Daytona and Orlando (where she once owned and managed a motel) and goes into orbit whenever there is a glitch in JUNO (the free e-mail system they use). Cecile can use only her left hand (right side paralyzed by stroke), but does not let that deter her.

Speaking for the rest, Joan added "a special thanks from all of us to our coaches for donating their Wednesday evenings. Your patience and good will -- and faith in our

aging abilities -- has sent our morale soaring."

Joan sent this message via e-mail, of course.

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