September 2002 Volume 2 Issue 1

Special Needs Tech News

A newsletter celebrating enabling technology, the people who use it and the companies that make it possible.

EDITOR'S CORNER

ARE YOU ORGANIZED? The new school year has arrived. If you're an educator, it's time to say goodbye to summer and hello to the start of another eventful year with colleagues and students. If you're a parent, it's time to get back into the routine of helping your school-aged children stay on top of their studies while still having time for their out-of-school activities. Oh, and you also have to keep your own appointments and tasks in mind as well. If you haven't already established a system for organizing daily and weekly tasks, this is a good time to take a look at how you've managed in the past and how you want to approach things this year. Think of all the information that will demand your attention and decide on the tools you'll need to remain in control through the busy months to come. High tech or low tech? It's still possible to do a good job with either. It's not always necessary to spend a lot on new gadgets to stay organized. A large calendar on the fridge could be all it takes!

Please feel free to make <u>complete</u> copies of this publication to share with others.

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<u>ASSISTIVE TECH EDUCATIONAL CONSULTING</u>

PROVIDING CLIENT-FOCUSED INFORMATION AND TRAINING ON SPECIAL NEEDS TECHNOLOGY. SPECIALIST IN COMPUTER APPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES AND LOW VISION

Join the ATCanada Listserv

The ATCanada Listserv was initiated on Dec. 30, 2001. Educators and members of the public may join this free discussion group to learn about or exchange information on assistive technology issues. Join at:

http://ca.groups.yahoo.com/group/ATCanada

or

http://ca.geocities.com/janethopkinsbc/

INSIDE

1 AT Canada Listserv

2 Mouse Tracks – Ability Hub and Vision World Wide

3 Bridgewater, Nova Scotia ATC

4 Corporate Kudos – Laser PC 6

5 Conferences

MOUSE TRACKS

Ability Hub

www.abilityhub.com

Ability Hub is a really helpful resource for educators, clinicians and consumers. Here you'll find information about assistive technology products, technical issues and articles. The site is update regularly with new product features and a link of the week.

Vision World Wide

http://www.visionww.org

Vision World Wide is a non-profit organization helping people with visual impairments. Visit their site to review their list of assistive technology products and free e-text and audio resources. Sign up for the free monthly Vision E-News.

BRIDGEWATER, NOVA SCOTIA ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY CENTRE

By Barbara Welsford,
ATC Manager

The Assistive Technology Centre (Bridgewater, Nova Scotia), a community based program partnering with the Nova Scotia Community College: Lunenburg Campus, South Shore District Schoolboard, Assistive Technology Centre Society and Betacom Corporation, has recently completed their first full year of operation. Activity in the ATC included 2500 interactions with primary and secondary users (2200 more than targeted), over 100 assessments for assistive technology for primary users, with disabilities, 75 workshops and dozens of orientations for the community on assistive technology to enhance awareness of the potential of A.T. in our area.

The South Shore District Schoolboard has placed Anita Kingdon in the centre. Anita is a full time Program Support Assistant with a vast background working with students with disabilities and technology. The South Shore District School Board has also placed a large quantity of technology in the centre for use with their students and teachers. The Community College campus has renovated and donates the space to the centre and the Assistive Technology Centre Society brings expertise, over 100 assistive technology devices and software packages and Betacom Corp. provides training and technology.

During the year we welcomed Karen Janigan, an area education student. Karen worked out of the Assistive Technology Centre during her practicum. Karen worked on a variety of devices specific to students in the school system, designed some onscreen keyboards using Clicker 4 and participated in and supported the delivery of a number of workshops offered by the Centre. We had a Program Support Assistant practicum student and another student work with us during the summer, supporting our programs and our services.

We developed a computer recycling program and placed over 24 computers with families of children with disabilities and students of the campus with disabilities. We received $20,000.00 from Ronald McDonald's Children's Charities to develop an Assistive Technology Loan Bank. The Assistive Technology Centre had a website designed by a student at Mount St. Vincent as a project for credit and a tremendous benefit to our program. The Centre has also connected with schools in Ottawa and is delivering videoconferencing training on assistive technology.

The Assistive Technology Centre offers a graduate level course in Assistive Technology through Continuing Education at Acadia University. All courses are run out of the Centre and are based on hands-on use of the technology.

We have also designed and will be delivering an Assistive Technology Course for Program or Personal Support Workers. This program will begin in September and is

recognized by the ATC and South Shore District School Board. Visit our website for details.

Throughout the year we worked with young children, school age and adults with Down Syndrome, Autism, Aspergers, quadriplegia, stroke, hearing impairments, learning disabilities, auditory processing difficulties, mood disorders, schizophrenia, neuromuscular disorders, muscular dystrophy, head injury, vision impairments, cerebral palsy, Charge syndrome, apraxia, amputees and so on. We worked with students at the South Shore Alternate School, Adult High School and Adult Learning Program, worked with youth from Katimavik, foreign students and many many more.

Our program is now self-sustaining, and we provide fee for service assessments, training and workshops to primary and secondary users of A.T. Those agencies or organizations involved in our partnership agreement provide these services at no charge.

The Assistive Technology Centre would also like to announce that we are a registered service provider for the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) of Nova Scotia.

For more information regarding the Assistive Technology Centre please visit our website http://assist-tech.ednet.ns.ca/.

CORPORATE KUDOS

LASER PC 6

Perfect Solutions

Laser PC6: Affordable Alternative to a Laptop

Are you searching for a portable computer for school or work that provides economy, convenience and functionality? The Laser PC6 is an inexpensive and compact alternative to a laptop computer that comes with nine built-in software programs and a selection of optional features.

Hardware Features

The hardware features of the 2 lb. Laser PC6 include a 9 x 1.5 inch liquid crystal display (LCD) providing a view of 8 lines by 80 characters. However, the “40/80” key on the bottom row of this product’s 66 key QWERTY keyboard offers quick access to enlarged type in the word processor for users who prefer the larger 4 by 40 display. There is also a display adjustment knob on the side of the PC6 providing the user with text and background contrast control.

The back panel of the PC6 is equipped with features that extend the capabilities of this computer. The input / output port supports both file transfer and printer cable connectivity. There is an external power port for the specialized AC adapter that comes with the PC6. The PC6 can also be powered on 4 AA alkaline batteries or a rechargeable nickel metal-hydride battery, which must be ordered. Three additional back-up batteries are included inside the PC6 to prevent the loss of data in memory when there is no power to the device. The auto shutdown feature is designed to conserve power without losing data. The default setting ensures the PC6 will shut down after 2 minutes without use. All data is automatically saved and the shut down time can be adjusted or disabled.

The infrared (IR) port provides a fast and easy method to transfer text data from the PC6 word processor to an open word processing document on another computer. Infrared transfer can be configured for Macintosh or IBM-compatible desktop or laptop computers. This sentence was “beamed” accurately into this Word document on my Sony Vaio laptop after being typed on the Laser PC6. This IR transfer feature provides

attractive flexibility for an individual or institution in need of a cost-effective computer access solution.

The PC6 has an additional port for optional add-on cartridges such as Roget's Electronic Thesaurus, Flash RAM w/ Passwords and Text-to-Speech. The Laser PC6 ships with its own carrying case, AC adapter, and printer cable as well as three reference guides – a detailed user's manual, ten minute tour booklet and a quick reference card.

Built-in Software Programs

The main menu of the PC6 is displayed shortly after the computer is turned on.

The user types the corresponding letter in order to access any of the available programs.

Word Processor

The PC6 word processor allows users to create up to 45 named documents, which are automatically saved and easily edited, deleted or printed when convenient. The black keys on the PC6 keyboard apply only to the word processor. These include the home and end keys, document spell checking feature, TTS (text-to-speech), IR Send and 40/80 keys. The home and end keys allow the user to quickly move the cursor to the top or bottom of the document. There are also special key commands allowing greater flexibility when working with documents on the PC6. For example, key commands for functions such as cutting and pasting text and spell checking individual words within a document are available.

As well, foreign language accents can be enabled for the word processor from the utilities selection on the main menu. Individuals who have a disability that makes it hard to depress more than one key at the same time can enable the sticky shift and control feature. When this feature is activated, the shift or control key doesn't have to be held down at the same time as another key to execute the desired command. Word prediction is a new feature that may be activated while word processing by pressing Ctrl-Z. This can assist users with spelling difficulties and increase typing speed by reducing the keystrokes needed to complete a word.

Organizational and Instructional Features

The additional software bundled with the Laser PC6 gives it an edge over some low-cost portable computers that primarily feature word processing capabilities. While the PC6 can be used exclusively as a word processor, its other built-in programs make it a good choice when seeking a device that can support an individual over time or adapt to multi-user needs.

The built-in typing tutor exercises help users to develop keyboarding skills. This feature promotes independent practice through engaging activities and performance feedback and is designed to teach keyboarding in only three weeks. The built-in calculator, spell checker, telephone directory and homework calendar eliminate the need for some users to carry additional devices and supports.

The database and Lotus-compatible spreadsheet programs are valuable for collecting and organizing personal, project, school or work-related information. These programs may be used infrequently by elementary school students, but can be very useful for advanced users. From an education perspective, the inexpensive PC6 provides a customizable range of productivity features to fit diverse needs at the elementary to postsecondary levels.

High Marks From Toronto Teacher

Debbie Pillar of the Ron Bingham Language Lab in the Toronto School District sees value in the Laser PC 6 for their students.

"We have been using the Laser PC6 for slightly over one year now and are extremely pleased with the educational benefits we are seeing.

"Not only does the text to speech capability allow students to self-edit, it increases their focus and time on task. We feel that

students are increasing their skills in areas of concentration, spelling, editing, time on task, and reading.

"We like the fact that there are no disks involved with the PC6 and therefore no risk of viruses. The PC6 is very user friendly. The students want to
use the PC6 so that they can use the Infra Red transfer.

"When we began using the PC6 we were located in a school with grades 6, 7 and 8. We purchased 30 PC6s and they were signed out before school started. We allowed the students to take them home and complete their work. We are now implementing a "Language Lab" in a number of schools within the Toronto District School Board. Each school receives one PC6 as part of the package. We hope that these schools will see the same benefits that we did and that they too will increase their number of PC6s from one to many."

Overall Benefits

The Laser PC6 has an "all-in-one" character to its design. The external simplicity of the PC6 is deceptive in that it could easily be assumed that its functionality would be very limited. The more I worked with the PC6, the more I appreciated its range of capabilities and the value of its design. Users will quickly learn to work with the most intuitive features of the PC6. Explanation of the more complex features can be located in the user's manual. These functions may be explored in accordance with each user's needs or incrementally as the user progresses. The portability of the PC6 adds to its overall appeal as a manageable easy-to-transport device for inside and outside use. Useful add-on utilities are available such as the text-to-speech cartridge, which supplies auditory feedback via a headset for enhanced literacy support for early literacy, ESL and learning disabled students. The text-to-speech option is a very unique feature for a device of this type. The Laser PC6 offers affordable computer access, flexibility and convenience for home, workplace and learning environments. To learn more about the Laser PC6 visit the Perfect Solutions website at www.perfectsolutions.com

This article has also appeared on AbilityHub.com

CONFERENCES

E-LEARN 2002
MONTREAL, QUEBEC
OCTOBER 15-19 2002
HTTP://WWW.AACE.ORG/CONF/ELEARN/

CLOSING THE GAP
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HTTP://WWW.CLOSINGTHEGAP.COM

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