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## **Youth club goes high-tech: Computers donated to the Tracy Boys & Girls Club give youth a chance**

By Dave Myhra - SAN JOAQUIN BUREAU

TRACY -- Kids at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Tracy, many of whom don't have computers at home, are about to get the opportunity to work on some fresh equipment.

Sitting in four new technology centers, one in each club site, is \$100,000 worth of high-quality computer equipment.

The money came from a grant from the Beaumont Foundation, Microsoft, and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

The rooms feature Toshiba laptop computers, color printers, and digital cameras, among other things.

The equipment will "help bring the kids up to speed on new technology," said Steve Gough, director of operations.

They are a big change from the computers the kids have been using in the clubs. Those machines were outdated, and students used them without the help of skills classes.

Life in the technology centers is going to be different.

The staff has spent the last few weeks getting familiar with programs, so they can teach the kids in formal classes.

Every aspect of club life will now feature a computer component.

Every one of the club's five core programs, Health and Life Skills, Arts, Education, Character Development and Leadership, and Fitness and Recreation, will be taught on the new computer systems.

All materials have been transferred from books to the computers.

To finish these new cyber-lessons "they'll have to go online to research, write a story on Microsoft Word -- it gets them to go all over the computer," Gough said.

One of the more interesting programs in the fitness section will allow the students to make a baseball card of them selves.

The kids also will learn other skills, including how to take and manipulate photographs, create music, build Web sites, and care for the computers.

Eventually, the club would like to be able to do a PowerPoint presentation at a meeting and tell the people in attendance that the kids put it together, Gough said.

The children also will be able to access a Boys & Girls Club chat room to speak with other members from all over the country.

With the new programs, the club hopes to give its members a real-world experience with the computers by showing them what they can really do, Gough said.

The kids won't get a crack at these machines until sometime next week. When they do, because each of the new machines is hooked wirelessly to the Internet, they will have to complete a short course on Internet safety.

The program, which for the younger kids is cartoon-based, teaches basics such as how to avoid people who want personal information or who want to meet in real life.

The club's staff members aren't computer experts, so they won't be able to give an all-encompassing view of all the capabilities of the newer computers and don't have the ability to fix the machines when they break down.

As a result, the club is looking for people with extensive knowledge of computers to volunteer by teaching a class or two.

To volunteer, call the club at (209) 832-2582.

The Boys & Girls Club of Tracy is located at 753 W. Lowell Ave.