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Youth computer lab gets big upgrade

Wyden visits Roseburg: Senator sees results of grants he encouraged groups to apply for

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Three days a week, 12-year-old Lucas goes to the Boys & Girls Club of the Umpqua Valley.

The Roseburg youngster likes to play basketball in the club's gym on Northeast Cedar Street. He also ventures into Club Tech, the organization's computer lab. There, he plays educational games that inform him about computer spam, bad behavior on the Internet and how children can protect themselves while online.

"It's teaching you good skills and habits, but it's fun at the same time," he said.

Since its founding in 2001, the Roseburg club had limped along using aging computers. Those machines didn't have a lot of memory and couldn't handle the programs the children are using today.

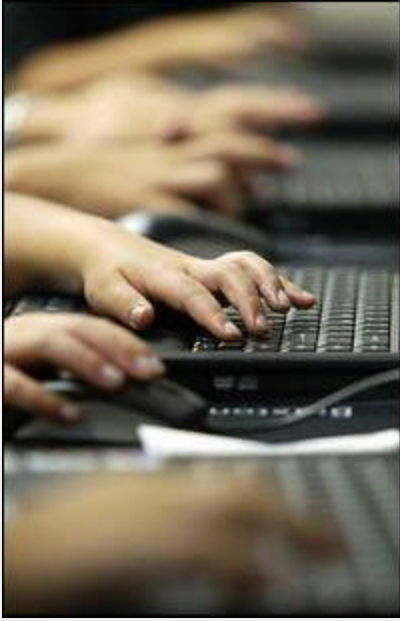
But late last year, the club received 10 new Toshiba laptop computers, a printer, digital cameras, a projector and wireless router. The equipment, worth \$25,000, was provided by the Beaumont Foundation of America, a Texas-based group that aims to provide computer access to low-income students.

Money for the foundation came from a class-action lawsuit filed against Toshiba America in 2000. The company was accused of selling 5.5 million laptop computers containing faulty floppy disks that could destroy data.

Toshiba settled the case before it went to trial and agreed to pay \$2.1 billion to nearly 2 million laptop owners. Many of the computer owners failed to file a claim and nearly \$350 million went unclaimed.

The lawyers involved in the lawsuit asked the court for permission to use the money for "public good" and they came up with the idea of providing computers to schools and groups serving children who might not have their own computers at home.

Keyboarding



Fingers pound away at the keyboards belonging to the Umpqua Valley Boys & Girls Club of Roseburg on Wednesday.
ANDY BRONSON/The News-Review

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden learned of the foundation project and promoted it through contacts with school officials and leaders of nonprofit organizations. He encouraged the groups to apply for the available grants.

More than \$1 million worth of equipment has been awarded to groups in Oregon. Besides the foundation gift, the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Umpqua Valley received \$15,000 in software from Microsoft Corp. and \$18,000 for additional equipment from the Cow Creek Band of the Umpqua Tribe of Indians.

"Education is the most important thing you can provide," said Wyden, who attended a ceremony Wednesday at the Boys & Girls Club in Roseburg. "We said everybody in our state should have access to this kind of technology."

Three of the 10 youngsters who were using the computers during Wyden's visit told the senator they didn't have a computer at home.

"You can see that most those kids in there didn't have access to computers. That's exactly what this program is attempting to help," Wyden said.

Between 80 to 100 children come in to use the Boys & Girls Clubs computers every day, computer aide Angel Eglin said. One popular program allows the children to visit various continents and learn about the animals that live there.

"You can imagine all that they learn when they go to each place," Eglin said.

Kendra, a 10-year-old who visits the computer lab several times a week, said that is one of her favorite programs.

"It's fun," she said.