Getting up to speed

Library fills local need with computer literacy courses

By JESSICA MAHER

Recorder News Staff

The Amsterdam Free Library realized the community need for a digital literacy training program, but two weeks after the launch of the Broadband Technology Opportunity Program, staff have been wowed by the response and feedback.

"It has definitely exceeded my expectations," said Katie Capel, a Public Computer Center Trainer. "It's not that I didn't think there was a need; I just didn't expect such a drive in the community."

More than 50 individuals are currently progressing through the course in five separate sessions and January's wait-listed roster has already met full capacity. Gloria Martuscello signed up as soon as she heard about the program, which has been funded by a grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

"I wanted a refresher and just to learn more and improve my skills," she said.

After starting with a class on basic computer skills, Martuscello had an hour-long course Monday evening on what she said was one of her main concerns -- the Internet. With BTOP director Thom Georgia leading Martuscello and her classmates on an overhead projection of a computer screen, she followed along on her own screen to search, bookmark, open windows and more. For the course, the student computers are put into a practice mode that simulate the programs that are run.

In the coming weeks, Martuscello and other sections of students will also have classes in Microsoft Word, Excel and e-mail.

"I'm hoping by the time we end this, I'll know what to purchase and understand the computer to the

fullest," said Martuscello.

The series is broken up into classes of less than 10 students, which are led and assisted by two of the library's PCCTs.

"They've been giving us good feedback," said PCCT Max McLeod. "A lot of them are coming in because their grandchildren or kids are always on a computer and they feel left out."

While there is a large senior population who participate in the course, Georgia said the youngest student is a 15-year-old. Many have never used a computer before, especially not the laptop models that the classes are taught with.

"I've been personally told that it's so nice to actually learn something that for so long has been a mystery," said Georgia. "It was very nice to see that this type of learning is appreciated and necessary."

The BTOP opened in late July, with the digital literacy training course just one aspect of the program. It has also included the opening of a public computer center dedicated to workforce development skills training and a student education center.

Capel, a certified teacher who runs the student education center, said that there has not only been an increase in students who use the center but also in the students who are using the center for school purposes and to be assisted in assignments.

The digital literacy training program is currently accepting students for the February 2011 series of classes. Those five classes will run for about six months and Georgia said the BTOP staff is currently writing curriculum for a new series of classes that may include Power Point, social networking and multimedia.

For more information or to register for the next course, contact the BTOP at 842-1080.

Contact Jessica Maher at jessica.maher@recordernews.com.