

Source: Mahopac News

Mahopac Public Library unveils new computer lab

by Sara Dunn

February 10, 2011

For close to three decades, the Mahopac Public Library has expanded its public mission far beyond lending books and holding cultural events. Its mission also includes career education and job skills training.

Now with the assistance of federal stimulus funds through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Mahopac Public Library has purchased 16 new computers, outfitted with up-to-date software, and hired two new staff members and expanded the position of another, allowing for significantly increased access to the library's Public Computer Center [PCC].

"When we built this building, we included a computer lab, but we didn't have the money to outfit it," said Library Director Patricia Kaufman, adding that the lab was equipped with donated, older-model machines. "We always dreamed of having a state-of-the-art computer lab."

The PCC on the third floor of the library will house 12 of the new computers, where both self-directed, self-paced computer-based classes and more hands-on instructor-led classes will be held. The center will be staffed by Director Lou Naclerio, reference librarians Fran Harrison and Amy Schapiro and library assistant Janet Hobbs.

The computer-based programs will allow library patrons a high degree of flexibility, allowing users to learn the ins and outs of computer programs, including Windows Office, Excel and PowerPoint.

An additional four new computers will be stationed in the computer area on the second floor, so that those using the job skills training programs can access them when the lab is closed.

Career workshops taught by the Director of the Job Information Center, Helen LiMarzi, will be ongoing, offering expert advice to members of the community on how to spruce up their resume, write an enticing cover letter and prepare for a job-landing interview.

The money that was awarded by the New York State Library will come in two phases. The first phase paid for the new computers and staff positions. The second installment will be used to purchase video-conferencing equipment, which will expand what the library can offer to patrons to the rest of the state, the country and the world, Kaufman said.

One idea on how the library might be able to facilitate both those who hold jobs and those who seek them, would be to use video-conferencing to help workers maintain or complete job certification requirements remotely, saving them both the time and money to travel up to Albany to do so. Video-conferencing will also allow libraries throughout the Hudson Valley to offer access to the programs offered at other libraries.

Kaufman said the schedule for computer classes will expand based on the demand they receive from the public, which has as of late been overwhelming. According to statistics released by the library, in a two-month period last November and December, more than 300 community members received assistance or training at the PCC.

"If we see waiting lists, we will add more classes," Kaufman said. "We are already seeing numbers go up in terms of use...it's like that baseball movie, 'If you build it, they will come.'"

Sara Dunn can be reached at dunn@halstonmedia.com.