

Never Too Old To Learn: Seniors Fill NCC Computer Classes

As computer instructor Roosevelt Bacon moved from desk to desk in a classroom at NCC's Workforce Development Center on Bergen Street, he patiently repeated instructions and tried to be as plain spoken as possible .

"If you don't see a blinking cursor, you cannot type," he told his pupils, some of whom seemed a little tentative. "Don't get nervous now. What I want you to do is think about what you're doing."

Most of these students, all senior citizens, had no prior computer experience but jumped at the chance to learn basic computing skills. The free eight-week class, "Elders of the 21st Century," was offered this summer as a pilot program through a partnership between NCC's Family Resource Center and the Salvation Army.

"In today's society, everything is on the computer. You can go online and do a lot of things. You don't even have to leave home," said Willie Martin, 75, a student in the class.

Classes met twice per week, for two hours at a time. One afternoon, Bacon was getting the students used to performing tasks like opening documents, as well as saving and creating folders.

"It's pointless to use computers if you can't save," he told a classroom full of 14 students.

Mattie Williams of Newark said she appreciated the thoughtful manner in which the class was being taught.

"He's thorough and goes over it to make sure you understand," she said of Bacon, the instructor.

Jean-Moses Jones, 62, noted she had worked with computers before, but explained it had been many years since she actually sat down at a terminal. She said she saw the notice advertising the class in the Pathmark supermarket, located in the NCC Shopping Center on Bergen Street.

New Community Corporation is seeking funders for the program, which Bacon feels is essential in order to ensure seniors are keeping pace with technology.

"We have left behind some of our elders as far as technology is concerned," he said. "It's really important that they learn how to use the computer. They can't run from it anymore. When they come face-to-face with this technology, they will be dumbfounded if someone doesn't teach them."

Lois Brownridge, 72, a receptionist at the Urban League of Essex County, also knew a little about computers but wanted to broaden her knowledge.

"It's a free class, so why not take advantage of it," she said, noting she was taking the class as part of her agency's staff development efforts.

JoannWilliams-Swiney, director of NCC's Family Resource Center, said interest in the class proved that the older generation wants to be part of the technological revolution.

"We had an overwhelming response," she said. "We couldn't get everyone in."

More information can be obtained by contacting the NCC Family Resource Center at 973-565-9500 or Workforce Development Center at 973-824-6484.



Willie Martin and Lois Brownridge shown here during the senior computer class.