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Princeton Young Achievers Poised to Tackle Digital Literacy Divide

Linda Arntzenius

Thanks to a Computer Literacy Grant from the Concordia Foundation, Princeton Young Achievers will be able to install 20 computers donated by the Girl Scouts of Montgomery into its three after-school centers: the Hank Pannell Learning Center on Witherspoon Street, and Learning Centers at Princeton Community Village and Redding Circle.

Executive Director Pamela Elmi received the news that the non-profit she joined in May had received the grant funding on Thursday, August 23.

"We are delighted," she said from her office in the Valley Road building, in space donated by the Princeton Regional Schools district.

When Ms. Elmi took over from Rebecca White-Johnson, who retired earlier this year, she promised to "tap into existing community resources" to achieve her fund-raising goals for the organization that was founded in 1993 to provide academically oriented after-school programs for children in kindergarten through fifth grade from Princeton's low- and moderate-income communities.

Citing Princeton resident Anne Reeves as a role model, Ms. Elmi said that she was preparing to enlist friends and connections in her efforts.

True to her word, she has called upon tech support from a "community friend from the Sustainable Business Network of Princeton — Dr. Wei-hsing Wang."

Dr. Wang, who holds a Ph.D. in Computer Science and is a former senior staff engineer for AT&T Bell Labs, is now President of NicheUSA, a Princeton-based computer software business. "I have many years of computer/web experience and a strong interest in education," said Mr. Wang, adding that he is pleased to be able to help bridge the digital divide.

During the year, Dr. Wang will train PYA teachers and conduct an internet safety workshop for parents.

PYA's Computer Literacy Initiative is the result of a community partnership. "Princeton Regional Schools and Bristol Myers Squibb provided internet service for us and the Girl Scouts will help move in the computers and re-do the labs by painting and assembling the computer carts," said Ms. Elmi.

The high-speed internet lines installed last year through Princeton Regional Schools and Bristol Myers Squibb will now be utilized for supervised homework research.

"Sunny days are ahead for the children of PYA," said Ms. Elmi who is looking forward to purchasing appropriate hardware and software for the after-school program.

Wish List

In spite of the optimistic outlook, PYA remains in need of volunteers and donations to benefit its 100 students.

Items among the PYA wish list are audio books, resource books and almanacs, Spanish/ English dictionaries, gently used non-fiction books that are easy to read, with photographs, charts, graphs; building materials (wooden blocks, Legos, Connex); CD players and headphones; computer programs; crafts and craft kits (like beads, sewing, weaving, knitting, etc.); drawing paper; electric pencil sharpeners; writing and drawing supplies; board games including Blink, Othello, Blokus, Risk, Scrabble (not junior), Stratego, and Battleship; laptops; magazine subscriptions such as Junior National Geographic, Junior Sports Illustrated, Nick Magazine, and Disney Magazine; maps; math manipulatives; modeling materials (clay Play-Doh, etc.); hands on science kits; staff training and inservices; white boards and dry erase markers; and a world wall map.

Anyone interested in becoming a volunteer or making a donation, should contact Princeton Young Achievers, 25 Valley Road, Princeton, N.J. 08540. For more information, call (609) 806-4216, or visit: www.princetonyoungachievers.org.