10-7-2008


Melanie Marquez

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital.usfsp.edu/usfsp_news_press_releases

Recommended Citation
https://digital.usfsp.edu/usfsp_news_press_releases/797
Conner Leads Computer Literacy Project

Filed under Press Releases, eNews Newsletter, College of Arts and Sciences on Tuesday, October 07, 2008 by Author: Melanie Marquez.

In partnership with Mt. Zion Human Services in St. Petersburg, Trey Conner, PhD, assistant professor of English, will establish an open source computer network for use by the Mt. Zion community.

The center, which serves residents in an area challenged by poverty and crime, has at least 50 computers which are obsolete for current mainstream software but can operate efficiently on a Linux-based network. Conner’s New Investigator Research Grant will provide Mt. Zion with the technology and guidance to set up a user-directed network to help the center’s participants, from children to adults, learn to use an open source network.

"In the process this becomes a different approach to community literacy," Conner said. "Members of the community have an opportunity to learn how machines are built and how they are networked. Once everything is installed, there are any number of opportunities for connections and creativity."

Conner met Patricia Fried, executive director of Mt. Zion Human Services, at September’s Civic Engagement Fair at USF St. Petersburg. Fried told Conner about the center’s literacy focus in their children’s center and its upcoming youth community center for teenagers. Through Conner’s project, networked computers will be available for students from age 3 and older.

"Open source isn’t just about programming and code," Conner said. "It’s an ethic. It’s a philosophy. It’s about communities controlling their own destiny and opportunity."

Conner learned about an Atlanta elementary school that piloted a successful migration to open source technology last year – an option that allows schools with limited budgets to build their education computing. Open source technology has a much lower cost because it bears no licensing fees for programs. The technology network moves away from the personal desktop computer model and relies upon central servers with client machines.

"We’re just really thrilled," Fried said. “This will give kids daily access to technology they haven’t had before. I think it’s going to be a real draw for our youth community center.”

Conner and his research assistant, David Havasi, will implement the project at Mt. Zion by providing a server and client machines arranged as a small network. Havasi is a senior majoring in economics. As Conner’s research assistant he will lead a workshop at Mt. Zion teaching the center’s participants how to set up their Linux network.

"This is our first off-campus implementation,” Havasi said. "We hope that from this we can grow out to other community centers and eventually public schools. This is a medium that shows that software ought not cost a lot of money at all. This makes technology accessible to as many people as possible."

The children, teenagers and adults that interact with the network at Mt. Zion will have the freedom and encouragement to use the technology in a variety of ways – establish information databases, create computer animation, do sound recording, use financial software, set up internet radio broadcasting or use mapping software.

“This is youth empowerment,” Fried said. “This empowers them to develop a skill set and allows them to grow in the areas they want to grow in. Many of them are struggling in school and this will give them an opportunity to succeed.”