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Technology in the Golden Years

Pace University computer science students will help senior citizens connect with family and friends.

By [Janie Rosman](#) | [Email the author](#) | February 14, 2011

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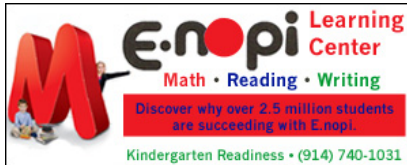
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Residents at [United Hebrew of New Rochelle](#) stepped into the future Tuesday when students from [Pace University's Ivan G. Seidenberg School of Computer Science and Information Systems](#) joined them for an orientation to their seven-week gerontechnology program.

"The program—Consortium for Multi-Faceted Gerontechnology Research—was initiated in October 2005, and piloted in spring 2006," said Pace University Associate Professor of Information Technology Jean F. Coppola.

Pace student Ben Williams has been a hardware and program team leader with Coppola for the past years. "I've walked multiple teams of students through installing, managing and updating the computers that were donated," he said.

Residents from United Hebrew's nursing home, assisted living facility and senior housing will be paired with a Pace University student for computer classes in the main building and in Soundview Senior Apartments and Willow Towers.

"You can learn a lot more about someone from another generation by spending time with the person," Linda Forman, Vice President of Community Relations at United Hebrew, told the 23 participating students.

The relationship is mutually beneficial.

"In my opinion, the greatest learning comes from listening and engaging with others," said Pace senior Krista A. Levito, who took Coppola's Intergenerational Computing class last year. "The class has changed my life."

"My top project (here) is upgrading their computer labs with the latest operating systems and upgrading hardware and other components," said Pace freshman Marc Kowtko said.

Residents at the senior facility were excited about the prospects of being able to send email to their friends and to talk with grandchildren via Skype. "I don't know anything about computers and am ready to learn," said United Hebrew resident Marion Dariano. "I know I can do this, and I can't wait to start."

"I want to learn to work with photos and make photo greeting cards," said Lizzie King, who has been with the program since its inception.

Pace student Ali Anwar worked with three United Hebrew residents, including King, during fall 2010 semester.

"She was the first person to use [Telikin](#) (touch screen) computers," Anwar said. "It helped as a visual aid since the keyboard comes with big numbers and letters, and she didn't need magnifying glasses."

Coppola said Telikin works well for seniors who may have motor, visual and auditory impairments or who can't handle the mouse and keyboard.

"And family may not make the best teacher for one another when it comes to learning the computer," she said.

Levito said the project "has not only altered the Pace community for the better, it has positively impacted the residents" involved with the students.

Students receive sensitivity training as well as reading assignments in technology in action, social gerontology and gerontechnology.

"We have the students put popcorn kernels in their shoes, masking tape on their fingers, cotton balls in their ears and wear visual impairment glasses," Coppola said.

"I learned patience, understanding, and I strengthened my listening skills," Levito said. "More importantly, I learned about their multi-faceted lives, and they gradually became my dear friends."

Mercedes Villavicencio was excited about her upcoming classes and sees them as a challenge. "I learned to drive at 54, and I can do this, too," she smiled.

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