

# Pace Students Help Seniors Adapt to New Technology

By Martin Wilbur

It may be unfair to stereotype senior citizens as disinterested in technology just because they didn't grow up with computers or may not be as accustomed to using them.

This semester three Pace University students have been working to make sure that older adults don't get left behind just because the world is changing so quickly around them.

Brittany Brower, Shannon Martinez and Elizabeth Meyers, enrolled at the university's Pleasantville campus, have been collaborating to spend two afternoons a week at My Second Home, a day program for older adults in Mount Kisco, acquainting interested seniors in using Skype. Skype is a software that allows users to speak over the Internet and to see the images of the person they are talking to over the computer screen.

For seniors who have children and grandchildren scattered around the country, the technology is a blessing for those who have signed up.

"It's something that we thought could be great for them because a lot of their families live far away," said Martinez, a junior from Seattle, who has used Skype to stay in touch with friends. "With the new technology that we have today, why not help the older generation out?"

The students, marketing majors who are doing the work as part of an intergenerational computer class, chose Skype because it is easy to understand and inexpensive to acquire, said Brower, in her final year at Pace. All it requires is to have a computer connected to the Internet where the user can download the software for free and register with a user name and password. For the two parties to see each other on the computer, each needs to have a small camera that costs about \$20 that sits on top of the monitor.

"A lot of them are really very excited and they realize that it's not as complicated as they feared," Brower said of the seniors she's helped register. "I feel like they're at ease and they're enjoying it."

Elizabeth Fenamore was at My Second home last Thursday afternoon and able to converse with her daughter in California after Brower signed her up. Fenamore, who has eight children and six grandchildren, said she used unsophisticated computers when she still was working for a travel agency years ago, so at least she has a rudimentary understanding of technology. Still, she did have to familiarize herself with the steps that needed to be taken but wasn't backing down.

"I'm too old for get intimidated," she said. "I'm 85 years old. I've been around a long time."

A Skype user can log on to any computer that has the software, so even if a senior doesn't have one at home, they can come into My Second Home or any other location and make their connections, Brower said.

The key to helping seniors with modern technology is to make sure they have a full understanding, said My Second Home Director Rina Bellamy. If they feel overwhelmed or if they're hit with words or phrases they don't understand, they're not going to bother, she said. Like anything else, some have no interest while others can't wait to try.

"You want to be in your comfort zone," she said. "But if you bring them to their comfort zone, it's okay."

This week are the last sessions the students have scheduled at My Second Home, but Brower said it's been gratifying to help families connect.

"It's great seeing how happy they are being able to finally see their family members after so long," she said.



MARTIN WILBUR PHOTO

Elizabeth Fenamore, foreground, receives pointers from Pace students Shannon Martinez, center, and Brittany Brower on how to use Skype to see and speak to her daughter in California.

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