

THE HISTORY OF COMPUTERS WEST

This is a story, a story of the vision and farsightedness of a core group of SCW residents whose aim was to share their knowledge and talents with others at a time when computer technology was new to most people and to bring this knowledge to them in their own back yard.

In 1984 an article initiated by seven residents was inserted into the Recreation Center News regarding the formation of a computer club. The purpose of the Club was and is to aid seniors to enrich their lives with computer classes, vocational programs, help and support services and information exchange. The motto "Technology Has No Age Limit" has been proven by volunteer seniors teaching fellow seniors.

The first meeting of Computers West was held in the R.H.Johnson Lecture Hall in 1984 with 83 residents attending. Membership grew to over 2700 members by 2001.

The Club formed User Groups for the 9 computers in use at the time. These User Groups met in homes and local Banks until space was allocated in the R.H.Johnson Recreation Centers Craft Rooms 1 & 2 in 1985. Space was also shared with the Leather Club at the Kuentz Rec. Center and classes were held in that facility.

CW Meetings were held monthly with representatives of the Computer Industry as speakers. The Club's newsletter, Random Access, was published in 1988 and has been mailed to members since.

In 1989 a new "Permanent" site for Computers West was provided at the Beardsley Rec. Center where User Groups met for classes and demonstrations. The following year, 1990, Computers West was sanctioned as a Chartered Club by the Recreation Centers of SCW. A 26" TV and a VCR were donated allowing the use of educational videos.

Computers West celebrated its 10th anniversary in 1994 with more than 1300 members and moved to the new site in the Palm Ridge Rec Center. Three rooms were provided, one for the IBM format, one for Apple Macintosh and one for the office and "Help Group". More electronic mechanics and the additional networking equipment, scanners and new type printers and PC's were added.

Computers West has provided Community Service over the years including: Counting votes at the 1984 Rec Center Board of Directors election; Working with the staff at Centro Adelante Campesino in Surprise; Working with staff at the Boswell and Del E. Webb Hospitals to demonstrate to handicapped people the use of the computer; Set up a computer lab at the Nadaburg School; Helped with the IRS "Tax Aide" program giving free assistance to taxpayers in filing their tax returns; Extended service to the "Maricopa Small School Consortium" adding 10 more schools with 163 donated computers; Helped the West Side Food Bank and donated computers to non-profit organizations; Collected old computers and equipment for recycling. Most donated items were given to the Students Recycling Used Technology Program (RUT); Collected battered and torn U.S. flags to be turned over to the VA for proper retirement; Collected donations for the Maricopa County Animal Shelter; Collected 3500 Cell Phones for Soldiers.

The CW Help Group provides assistance to members with their personal computer problems. It is estimated that the CW Help Group saved members over \$75,000.00 during only one 9 month period and continues to save members expenses by resolving their computer problems without charge to the member.

In 2003 The Recreation Centers allowed CW permanent use of the Palo Verde room for overflow classes. CW provides classes free of charge or for a minimal fee for hands-on classes. By 2008, over 39 classes had been scheduled covering interests from basics to personal interests.

A summary of the structure of Computers West explains what the Club provides for its members and how the dues are spent. CW purchases all of the computer equipment for use in rooms A, B, and the Palo Verde Room and Summit A. This equipment is maintained, repaired and replaced by the CW

Help Group. CW provides classes and plans for education scheduling, supplying teachers and providing supplies. There is no charge for lecture type classes and a minimal charge for hands-on classes to help cover the cost of the programs.

Programs for general meetings are planned and speakers obtained for member's enjoyment and education, socializing and learning.

The Computer room is open to members from 8 am to 4 pm Monday to Friday provided that CW members volunteer as monitors.

The Computers West website was instituted as www.computerswest.org. This site enables members to view the "Club Calendar" which lists classes and Club activities.

CW has remained true to its original purpose and is important as ever, providing a continual learning experience, keeping Sun City West residents informed and trained in the newest computer technology and with the selflessness of our Club volunteers, it will continue to do so.

A detailed History of Computers West is available in the CW Archives.