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Seniors get computer-savvy

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Phyllis Harvey of Hugo bought her first computer a few months ago to help her keep in touch with her grandchildren. She's now taking classes at the White Bear Area Senior Program to help her figure out how to use the "complicated contraption."

"It won't be long before I'm as computer-savvy as my grandkids are," Harvey said.

The senior program offers two courses to help Harvey and other seniors keep up with the information age.

Al McComber of White Bear Lake braved last week's snowstorm to attend the "Senior Surf Day" class so he can catch up to his computer-literate wife. The class is usually limited to five participants, but because the snow kept his other classmates at home, McComber got some one-on-one tutoring.

Instructor Roger Anderson, a St. Paul resident who volunteers through the Metropolitan Area Agency on Aging, started with the basics such as how to use the mouse and how to log on to the Internet.

The class is for the most novice of computer users, Anderson said, even someone who has never touched one before. After showing McComber the computer fundamentals, Anderson taught a few keys to using the Internet, including how to type in addresses and bookmark favorite sites.

"Using the Web is really easy once you get it set up," Anderson said.

Anderson helped McComber search through genealogy records to find his grandfather.

"I spelled genealogy wrong," Anderson said. "But Google is smart, see here it gives you the right spelling."

Volunteer instructor Celia Wirth of Grant leads the program's other computer course, "Is That Computer a Mystery? Learn How to Use it." The bimonthly class also is limited to just a few participants and is targeted for students who have some computer experience, Wirth said (by that she means they can at least find the on button and figure out how to play solitaire).

In Wirth's class the participants each chose one or two topics to learn about. Last week, the topics included sending e-mails, formatting digital photographs and using Microsoft Word.

"See the squiggly green line under the word?" Wirth asked Phyllis Harvey, who was typing a letter in Word. "That means it thinks something is wrong with your grammar. But be careful, Word's grammar is about as good as mine is. It's not always right."

Student Bari Chilton of White Bear Lake had taken another computer class before, but said this one was more helpful because she chose her own topics and had the opportunity to ask

questions.

For people who have not grown up with computers, learning to use one on their own can be very challenging, Wirth said.

"The class is a fun, no-pressure opportunity to learn some of the computer skills they would most like to learn about," Wirth said.

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