1

Organization to Provide Equal Access to Technology
"Access to technology is a right, not a privilege."

OPEAT Build-A-PC IT Summer Camp
Final Report

July 28, 2010

The OPEAT Build-A-PC IT Summer Camp was a total success. With financial support from IEEE Central North Carolina Section and the Life Committee Fund of the IEEE Foundation, plus some camp fees, we were able to put together a first class summer camp at Weaver Academy. The report will be broken into two sections – *an account of* and *lessons learned from* the camp.

With more than two weeks remaining before camp, we had a full enrollment of twenty (20) campers. The campers were drawn from four sources – IT department's within Guilford County Schools (primarily the Central Region – Kiser, Kernodle, Jamestown, Guilford, Allen Middle Schools and High School Ahead), Tristan's Quest (www.tristansquest.com), the Work Forced Development Board of Greater Greensboro, and Hayes-Taylor YMCA. The ability of the campers ranged from Advance Learners to one student who was literally just leaving a group home and entering into a new foster family. Our goal was to see each camper improve on their technical skills related to understanding computers, but we also place emphasis on developing team skills and personal development. I will touch on this point later.

Our core staff was comprised of Susan Morrissett and Ryan Knudsen from the IT Department at Weaver Academy, Dr. Claude Hargrove of IEEE Central North Carolina Section/North Carolina A&T State University, Executive Director Barbara Davis of HandyCapable Network (during Monday's building of the PCs), Rafael Llorens volunteered to work with a camper with Asperger's Syndrome, Leshon Pinnex (a senior Weaver IT student) and myself.

To measure the success of the camp, we divided the campers into four teams. Each team was given a digital camera. Each member of the team was required to use the camera and to learn to up load pictures to their PC and to save those pictures in a file. The team as a whole was tasked with agreeing on a presentation format. We divided ourselves into four mentors with each of us taking a team. Each team was tasked with the goal of documenting the unique footprint of the camp.

We had a full house on opening day with at least one parent, guardian or friend joining our campers for the welcome. By 9:45am, we had settled into Mr, Knudsen's lab and campers were building their personal computers. Prior to the start of camp, Mr. Knudsen, Dr. Hargrove, Ms. Davis and I deconstructed each computer and arranged the lab with individual work stations.

Campers were allowed to migrate to sections of the lab that felt right to them. For each team, we pre-selected campers we thought would make great team leaders. We assigned campers to each team. That said, we then asked each team to vote on a leader. These leaders met with their teammates and by vote were made official team leaders. In one case, the team made the decision to go with another team leader and he proved to be wonderful. With amazing dexterity, the campers had fully rebuilt almost all of their computers before lunch-time. As always with computers, one or two units developed issues. For that we already had backups and we were able to draw on parts from those systems. In one case, we switched the entire computer out. By 3:30pm, we had installed the operating system and we had nineteen functioning computers.

After Monday morning, I made the decision to use breakfast and lunch as a time to brief and debrief the campers. For example, I would use breakfast to orient the campers to the day's activities and to steer them in the right direction. At lunch I would reinforce the rules and hold discussions on the field trips that day. These two steps provided the camp with two stabilizing beams that provided a nice additional framework for the camp structure.

On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday we traveled on field trips. Our first trip was to the Natural Science Center of Greater Greensboro. At the science center, students enjoyed the planetarium where they watched three shows - *Black Hole's*, *Summer Skies*, and *an improvised viewing of the local sky*. At the end of the session, the program director fielded questions on their new Konica – Minolta Sky Projector and other aspects of the show.

On Wednesday, we traveled to NewBridge Bank Park. Program Manager Allison Moore took the campers on a behind the scenes look at technology and its roll in entertaining baseball fans. With temperatures spiking that week, we were very concerned with hydration. Each camper carried with them extra water bought with funding from IEEE. Campers were introduced to the central computer that holds each day's game-time schedule, the computer dedicated to making the great in-game noises, and the computer that housed the program for music and video. Their eyes grew great big when Allison allowed them to make simple entries into the central board from which Allison coordinates each of the other press box associates.

With temperatures soaring above 100 degrees, our campers were challenged to keep themselves together. In the negotiation for the field-trip, Allison and I had agreed that the students would eat their bag-lunch near the stadium entrance, in the courtyard. Needless to say we did not know that the temperatures would change 20 degrees between that conversation and the trip. Because of the heat, we encouraged the students to eat more quickly and we easily returned to base camp without incident.

On Thursday, we traveled to the International Civil Rights Center and Museum. We were met by two staff members – Tour and Events Coordinator Angela Fitzgerald and Media and IT Specialist Michael Sileno. In a unique tag-team approach, we received a two for one tour. The new Civil Rights museum is dedicated to the research and presentation of events that shaped the history of the United States. As one might expect, Angela provided the narrative for the social and historical civil rights content and Michael introduced our campers to the IT that made the exhibit unique. For example, each site had motion sensors linked to local computers pre-programmed to start a program just as the visitor was settling in. With Angela describing the water hose attack on

marcher's in Mississippi, Michael would follow with an explanation on how they were able to time this delivery with the start of vintage news footage from that period. In one projection room, the camera and screen were actually working backward to the normal projector out front, projecting onto screen along a front wall. In this case, the screen was in-bedded within the wall and the projector was tucked away inside a small closet behind the screen. Fantastic! The tour lasted two hours. We arrived back at our base camp at Weaver and enjoyed another hour discussion of civil rights and the some of the other social changes that have taken place in the United States since February 1960.

On field-trip days, we would re-enter IT class in the afternoon. Susan Morrissett instructed campers on the basics of HTML. We actually struggled with whether or not the middle school students would be able to handle the HTML language. In the end, we sided on the more academically sophisticated side of "yes"! And did they respond. To make sure every camper was able to understand the new language required the full attention of each mentor and the use of many of our Advance Learner campers. As a result, we began to see each and every camper emerge as a web designer. We could have settled on an easier program but the kids actually took to the HTML language and writing the content for their websites. We were very proud that we were able to visually share with parents actual HTML writing that produced each campers beautiful website.

Friday was crunch time. We were fortunate to have media visits throughout the camp. Our campers handled these visits like pros. Three of our campers were interviewed, two for broadcast news and one for radio news. So with the WFMY News 2 reporter pulling some of our team leaders in front of the camera, each team launched into a final push to wrap up their weeklong project. Each team set to work polishing their final website or PowerPoint presentation and by 11:30am were rehearsing their roles in the presenting the project at the closing ceremony. To document the campers work, we tasked Leshon with working with each team and their mentor to save each team members *personal website* into a team file, along with the team's *final presentation.* All four team files were then stored in one OPEAT master file. This information was stored on an 8G external hard drive. We are now in the process of creating a secure website for a permanent record of the camp. In a final touch, we brought in a cameraman who filmed the closing presentations. We had approximately 20 plus family, friend and visitors attend our closing.

We learned a lot of lessons from our first camp. We will improve on the variety of tasks we make available to our advanced learners. We will make sure we build mini-breaks into our intense sessions. We all agreed that mini – breaks would benefit both session leaders and campers. I found that I would improve on the sign-in and sign-out page. We believe we have achieved a wonderful camp format. We also agree that tweaking it can make it even better. Overall, the comments of parents, campers and team leaders were overwhelming affirmative. We enjoyed great media treatment. We were featured on television, radio and print. Viewers and listeners of these programs have written and phoned in requests for after-school and home-school programs. With the creation of this summer camp model, we have drawn a blue print that any similarly motivated program coordinator can utilize anywhere in the world.

Jeffrey R. Whisnant, Executive Director

Organization to Provide Equal Access to Technology (OPEAT), Inc.