

Connections

Expanding the electronic web

Changes in the works for nonprofit computer network

The News & Observer will offer access to the Internet for members of NCexChange.

By TODD COHEN

North Carolina's computer network for nonprofits will undergo some changes under a deal being worked out between *The News & Observer* in Raleigh and NCexChange, which

coordinates the network.

The changes will give NCexChange members access to information provided through NandO.net, *The News & Observer's* new computer information service.

NCexChange, an affiliate of Legal Services/North Carolina Client and Community Development Center, has about 160 members and is part of HandsNet, a national nonprofit computer network with about 2,800 mem-

bers. HandsNet, itself a nonprofit, focuses on anti-poverty and human service issues, and costs subscribers \$400 to \$600 a year, based on how much they use the network.

The fees cover HandsNet's cost of managing the national network, as well as the cost to Connect, a for-profit company, of running the hardware and software for the system.

That fee gives a subscriber access both to NCexChange and its

North Carolina computer forums, and to HandsNet and its forums, which focus on national policy, programs, research and trends.

NCexChange promotes the North Carolina network and provides technical training and support to its members. It also manages, on HandsNet, a computer forum for Tar Heel nonprofits that includes separate sub-forums on rural development, housing, health, the environ-

ment, community economic development, sustainable agriculture and small farms, poverty, and nonprofit resources.

NandO.net provides access to a variety of information services, which now will include NCexChange. NandO.net also provides access to the Internet, a free global network of computer networks. NandO.net

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Community cooperation Wake hospitals team up for inner-city schools

Traditionally fierce competitors, Wake County's three hospitals have formed a foundation to provide services in the community. The foundation's first project is to provide nurses in inner-city schools.

By TODD COHEN

School children in six schools in predominantly black Southeast Raleigh are getting nursing and other health services that weren't previously available, thanks to a new foundation formed by the county's three hospitals and its health department.

While improving health care for inner-city kids is its first undertaking, the Hospital Alliance for Community Health represents an advance among the public Wake Medical Center, the nonprofit Rex Hospital and the for-profit Raleigh Community Hospital toward collaborating with one another.

Formed last summer, the Alliance is funded with \$350,000 from the three hospitals, with each contributing an amount based on its number of beds. The hospitals have agreed to fund the initial project for at least three years.

The money is paying for full-time nurses at Enloe High School and Ligon Middle School and half-time

nurses at Bugg, Conn, Hunter and Poe elementary schools.

The Alliance also has opened a clinic next to Ligon that will serve kids in those six schools and in Southeast Raleigh generally.

The program is designed to identify youngsters who may be sick or have other problems, and to get their families involved in solving those problems. The goal is to keep students healthier and to prevent the types of related problems that stem from poor health, including poor school performance and high dropout rates.

"If we can help families and kids be healthier, we can in fact improve both school attendance and school performance," says Crystal Helm, Ligon's principal.

Karen May, Ligon's new nurse, says that the number of students going home sick this year has fallen dramatically - to 116 in September and October, compared with 256 for the same two months last year.

May says she's able to identify a variety of problems that otherwise might go undetected because children lack access to health care. Those include anxiety about school, lack of nutrition, high blood pressure and asthma.

By making health care more accessible to children, says Leah Devlin, Wake's health director and



A new program funded by three Wake County hospitals will place nurses such as Karen May, here with Ligon Middle School student Chanice Harris, in six public schools in Raleigh's inner-city.

Photo by John Fletcher Jr.

president of the board of directors of the Hospital Alliance, the Alliance can help address many of the problems that affect their lives and their ability to learn.

She says the Alliance hopes to seek funding from other sources to expand the school health project and also to address other community problems.

Wake Med, Rex and Raleigh Community Hospital have collaborated before: For the past five years, the

hospitals and county have funded a program to coordinate care outside the hospitals for patients with AIDS.

Generally, though, the hospitals have competed fiercely with one another. Indeed, Jack Willis, president of Rex, says the partners in the Hospital Alliance are a "strange mix."

But hospital officials see the Alliance as a way to reach beyond their walls and provide services in the community, and as a step to

working more closely with one another.

"We decided collectively that it was in the best interest of the community, as opposed to selfish competition," says Ray Champ, president of Wake Medical Center. "I think that the sense of the group is that they are open to other kinds of projects."

Willis agrees. "I think this is just a forerunner, under health care reform, of what you're going to see."

Getting help

Paid consultants an option for nonprofits

While free assistance and equipment are available for nonprofits looking to use computers in their operations, North Carolina consultants specializing in nonprofits also offer their services. They cost money, but the investment may pay off in the long run.

By KAY MCFADDEN

To pay or not to pay? Several months ago, this column lamented the fact that North Carolina apparently has no freebie services to help nonprofits set up and use computer systems.

Unlike California, where well-organized technical support organizations abound, the Tar Heel state lags in assistance geared to the specific needs of charitable groups. This seemed surprising, considering the

presence of two big high-tech centers - in Research Triangle Park and Charlotte.

Well, our lamentations provoked some a sharp response from for-profit folks who specialize in computer consulting to nonprofits.

They pointed out that in the search for free services, nonprofits risk being pennywise and pound-foolish - and information is too critical to cheap out on, as one consultant so aptly expressed.

As it turns out, the North Carolina Center for Nonprofits is in agreement. Program Director Trisha Lester has assembled a list of paid consultants who aid nonprofits in purchasing, installing and operating computer systems. We've included that list at the end of this column.

"Our consultant database is made up of either first-hand recommendations from nonprofits who've used

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them and liked them, or those whose work we've experienced directly," says Lester. "Obviously, the list is not exhaustive."

She adds that it's up to a nonprofit to handle fee negotiations with a paid consultant; no guidelines are posted. But Lester does emphasize that the Center for Nonprofit always gives the names of three consultants.

"We encourage everyone to shop around," she says. One final note from Lester: All of the consultants on the list work with a variety of hardware and software products, so nonprofits know they aren't getting one particular manufacturer's products shoved at them.

In addition to paid consultants specializing in nonprofits, another category of assistance emerged on our radar screen: Groups that provide free technical assistance to any

business setting up a computer system.

Such groups typically help small businesses - a category that shares much in common with nonprofits when it comes to tight budgets and operating needs.

The Small Business & Technology Development Center is headquartered in Raleigh and has 15 offices throughout the state. Essentially an extension service for small businesses, SBTDC is supported by the University of North Carolina and by the federal Small Business Administration.

"We oftentimes get asked by smaller organizations how they can utilize technology in their workplace," says Scott Daugherty, executive director of the SBTDC. "Nonprofits are just like small businesses in that they are looking at

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