

Back Again ... Computers for Kids and Santa too!

Submitted by John Switzer, Clinton Conservation District

When Clinton Conservation District started the Computers for Kids recycling program 3 years ago, we thought we would just try it and see how it develops. No one ever thought we would rebuild 34 computers, as we did last year. That's 34 kids who didn't have access to a computer at home, but now do. The rapid growth of the program can largely be attributed to Gary Fritz, the Conservation District Executive Director, who has been leading the program since it first began in 2008.

And for Gary, 34 still isn't enough. This Christmas, our reach is expanding to include not only Clinton County, but also northern Ingham County, where Gary's son, Chris Fritz, works and lives. Chris has been helping to rebuild machines for the program since its inception and is now the owner and manager of Power On, a computer repair and tech support center in downtown Lansing. With the additional resources of Power On, Gary wants to shoot for at least 50.

Last year, Santa delivered 6 of the computers in person with assistance from his helper. Gary and Chris both look forward to being able to teach the kids how to use their computers, and watching them as they explore and discover. As Gary says, "We offer families the possibility of having Santa or a helper deliver the computer and work with the kids to get them started, but parents can also surprise the child with a box under the tree on Christmas Day, and help the kids themselves."

Last year, 3 school systems participated and we also worked with Habitat for Humanity to hold a special drawing, donating equipment to them to be sold in their efforts to raise money to build houses for families in need of shelter. But our most important partner every year is the community. All our computers are donated by the generous folks and businesses of the Greater Lansing area.

If you're thinking about making a donation, a typical system should be at a minimum Pentium 4 with 512 MB memory and 40 GB hard drive. Working monitors, mice, and keyboards are also desired. If you're not sure whether your system meets these requirements, you can call the Clinton Conservation District office or bring the computer to Power On at 114 W. Allegan in downtown Lansing, and Chris will let you know. If you're worried about the information already on your computer, your privacy is safe with us. We completely wipe every computer before loading them up with non-proprietary software, including games and educational programs.

"We start early so we can be ready for our deliveries a few days before Christmas," said Chris. "Anyone with a working computer that's just collecting dust should get on the phone as soon as possible and call either the Clinton Conservation District at 989-224-3720 or Power On at 517-798-6098. You'll change a kid's life, forever."

"By the way, Gary indicated, Santa called again last year and wished to thank the teachers, school administrators, and our friends at Habitat for Humanity for helping us

identify the children chosen and also to the everyone that donated their computers to enable Santa to make another child happy.”

Clinton Conservation District is located at 2343 N. US-27 in St. Johns, MI.

Power On is located at 114 W. Allegan, in Lansing MI. Power On offers computer repair and practical education in hopes of “simplifying the computer experience”.