

Narrowing the digital divide

❑ **Turner House goes high-tech to help community learn up-to-date computer skills**

By **CARMEN CARDINAL**
for *The Kansan*

People living in Northeast Kansas City, Kan., have a new place to learn how to use computers.

Turner House has added a new 10-unit adult and community computer lab for community residents to use and to learn computer skills.

"No one living around Turner House can say that the computer age has passed them by," said Gerald Hall, executive director of Turner House. "Now they are within walking distance to skills training."

Turner House, located at 2052 N. Third St., is an Interfaith Community Partnership program and an affiliate of the Episcopal Diocese Services. It is a nonprofit agency. They provide emergency assistance, youth programs, educational programs and faith community partnerships. It was founded in 1964. It is supported through the Episcopal Social Services, United Way, public grants and contracts and private donations.

Computer classes will be



TRICIA O'CONNOR / of *The Kansan*

Stephanie Campbell, left, and Alisha Abram look at e-mail in the new Turner House computer lab, which opened July

1. Karen French, lab manager, said some senior citizens came in who had never touched a computer.

provided for all adults in the community who want to learn. No one is too old to learn, whether they want to learn office skills like Word, Excel, Access and Power Point to improve their earning skills, or if it's just a grandparent who wants to learn to e-mail the grandkids.

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- **Gerald Hall, executive director, Turner House**

Computer skills are vital for anyone who wants to succeed in many work environments. The program wants to eliminate the "digital divide" affecting minority communities. The program is designed to ensure that no child or adult is left behind, accord-

ing to Hall. It is part of the new Internet and "e-Village" connectivity being created as part of the W.E.B. DuBois

Telecommunications HUB Project in Kansas City, Mo. "For 10 years, we have been teaching computer skills to the children in their own labs. Now we want to decrease the computer void between adults and children," said Hall. "Kids see computers as a game but many adults are (See **COMPUTERS**, page 5)

Computers

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afraid to even touch a mouse."

"I recently spoke to 30 students and I asked them how many had operated a computer and only about three said 'Yes,'" said Kathy Colon, an employee at the Environmental Protection Agency and a volunteer at Turner House. She will be one of the instructors for the computer classes.

"I then asked the students, how many of you have played video games, and all the hands went up," she said. "Well, video games are like a PC computer, I explained to them. They have hardware, software and controls."

Children are fearless when it comes to using computers. Some adults are more fearful of attempting to learn, Colon told the *Kansan*.

Colon also operates her own company, Try-Visions, which deals with computer training and services.

The computer lab was given as a gift from the Episcopal Church as part of the national and local effort to support Turner House Community "Jubilee" Ministry Center in Metropolitan Kansas City.

A \$35,000 gift from the church in 2001 enabled Turner House to address its "e-village" goal which would make them the hub of a computer system.

The new computer lab will assist Turner House in its work with the Juniper Gardens HOPE VI initiatives; the new

YouthBuild literacy education program; students attending area public schools; the recently established PowerUp Labs in Greater Kansas City; and the emerging church based computer technology laboratories.

"We want a comfortable, convenient environment where people can walk to and use our labs," said Hall. "Some of our community people don't have transportation to go to the library downtown and those who do often can't find parking."

The library also limits the time a person is using a computer if there are others waiting to use them, as there sometimes are.

On July 1, a grand opening ceremony of the computer laboratory was attended by Bishop William E. Smalley, Bishop Barry Howe, Rector Robb Lord of St. Michael-All Angels, Congressman Dennis Moore and the Board of Turner House and local HUD officials and Unified Government representatives.

"The gifts from the Episcopal U-Thank Fund and St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church is one part of an overall effort to demonstrate the compassion and caring of the church in its mission to citizens served by Turner House," said Jay Lehnertz, president of the Episcopal Social Services.

The skill level training will be provided will be from the most basic, like turning on the PC and using a mouse for the first time, to advanced skill levels.

The labs will be fully operational by Sept. 1.

IN 2003, WHAT WILL IT COST?

Neighborhood Resource Center
\$1,000,670

UG building security
\$723,098