

ACC explores on-line courses

Kate Splitt
Staff Writer

Does anybody remember the Jetsons? Elroy and Judy would wake up in the morning, get dressed, have breakfast and then sit down in front of the television screen to see the teacher's smiling face looking back at them. Sounds pretty futuristic, right? Well, it's not. The future is here. We can not only do our shopping on the Internet; we can take college courses and even get a degree on our home computers.

Alpena Community College, along with other community colleges in the state, have joined together to create the Michigan Community College Virtual Learning Collaborative. After attending a seminar presented by this organization, instructors Terry Hall and Jeff Blumenthal began setting up a Language and Reason course which Hall says will be available to students as early as the fall semester. According to Hall, the trend toward Internet classes is new but growing rapidly.

"Five years ago, there were only a few classes around the country that were available," he says. "Now there are hundreds. In fact, I think there's a university that is totally on the Internet. It has no buildings. I thought that the Language and Reason course would lend itself to this kind of approach."

There are many advantages in taking on-line classes.

Because certain segments of the population can't attend regular classes, such as persons with physical limitations or family issues, the availability of classes on the Internet would accommodate these dilemmas.

"There was an effort that started two or three years ago by some individuals that were kind of pioneers in their field," says Jeff Blumenthal. "They wanted to take a look at distance learning. They wanted to utilize the Internet and web-based instruction because they saw this as the wave of the future. They wanted to make it so learning could be done anytime, anywhere."

Typically used by working professionals juggling careers and families, Internet classes provide the ability to upgrade training and, also, to pursue college degrees. The popularity of on-line learning has doubled the number of classes in the last year.

"One of the things I see, from a visionary standpoint," says Blumenthal, "are businesses and individuals [who] need continual training. That's not going to go away."

Not only can students benefit academically, on-line classes may be less expensive.

"Let's say, for example," explains Blumenthal, "you're a student at Michigan State University and there's a class offered at Lansing Community College, and it's being offered on-line, it's going to cost you less. The student could sign up for it, take it on-line and then transfer the

"This stuff is happening now."

Jeff Blumenthal

class to MSU. This stuff is happening now."

Blumenthal knows firsthand about being a cyber-student as he is continuing his education on-line.

"It's been a challenge," he says. "It's a lonely experience. Sometimes, you're out there wondering what the instructor was thinking. You wonder if the other students feel the same way about an assignment and there might be questions that you have for the instructor.

"Let's say I write the instructor about these questions. I might not hear back for a day or so, so you're kind of left in limbo. It's been a challenge but very enjoyable. I've been able to communicate with working professionals in different parts of the country, different parts of the world."

This type of instruction, however, is not for everyone. There are concerns about the isolation and the need for interaction with other students.

"I have to admit," says Blumenthal, "that being the so-called 'technological guru,' I'm still frightful of that type of atmosphere. It's very important to interact with people. You can't function with this alone. I see this as a potential for isolation if the individual doesn't have the development skills to express and communicate."



No Y2K problems result of college's preparation

By Chanda Wekwert
Staff Writer

So the year 2000 has struck and people have begun to relax. The newspapers have ceased writing headlines featuring Y2K and most people have forgotten the panic frenzy they were in just a short month ago. Now that everything has returned to normal and people have settled down, Lyle Beck, MIS director at ACC, said the college was "well prepared" for the possible dangers of the Y2K computer bug.

The beginning of 1999 signaled the start of a race to examine all 450 of the computers at the college for possible problems. Then again in December, with the last month of the millennium drawing to a close, all of the computers were tested again.

Through the course of preparing the computers, about 3,000 hours of other programming was delayed until after the year 2000. The programs delayed dealt mostly with account receivable and payroll revisions.

Exactly 90 computers were replaced during the year as they were found incapable of supporting the necessary year 2000 software. On Dec. 31, all of the computers were shut down in anticipation for midnight except for the Internet server; and early on the morning of Jan. 1, all of the computers were powered back up so they could be examined for

"The computers were tested for possible problems associated with the millennium but that everything 'worked out as we anticipated it would.'"

Another possible computer problem was mentioned during the board meeting, the unexpected arrival of a Leap Year this year. When Beck was asked if the computers would have a problem, he likened it to the earlier scenario of 9-9-99 and termed it the "Leap Year's Challenge."



Life-Long Learners bring variety to course offerings

By Celeste M. Mertz
Staff Writer

Over the past two years you have probably noticed many "older" students on campus. These older learners are most likely participants of the Association of Lifelong Learners at Alpena Community College.

ALL @ ACC blossomed when a group of volunteers worked together at a holiday function in December 1997. The group began talking about a pamphlet they had seen from the National Elderhostel which outlined some extended learn-

ing programs for various groups globally.

"It sounded neat," recalled Dennis Doubek, ALL @ ACC executive chairman. From that point on, the group worked long and hard to get the program off the ground.

Meetings with Chris Angel from ACC's Volunteer Center followed and by May of 1998 the new group had its first membership meeting.

Within the first year, ALL @ ACC surpassed its goal of 50 members with 168 participants. The group currently serves 205 people from many towns and villages in the area.

This special group offers year-long or life-time memberships at very reasonable rates. To join, one must be 50 years of age or older or a retiree.

ALL @ ACC offers a wide variety of experiences for its members. The group is involved in continuing education classes, out-of-door excursions, cultural trips, dancing, card playing, film series, travel series, and a vast array of other recreational and educational opportunities. Friendships, companionship, increased physical activity and social and intellectual gains are all part of the beauty of the group.

The program is run on its own budget with funds stemming from membership dues. Volunteers sit on the executive board, volunteers from the community share their expertise, whether it be from computers to history, by teaching classes, and volunteers from ACC support the program.

Doubek said that ACC President Donald Newport and the Board of Trustees at Alpena Community College are "instrumental" in keeping the program up and running.

Every three months the programs change, and more

new and exciting classes are introduced. The program is tailored to fit the needs and wants of older adults and strives for "continued educational stimulation," said Doubek.

Thus far, ALL @ ACC is quite successful. The continued dedication of all volunteers and participants can only make it more so.

For more information on the Association of Lifelong Learners at Alpena Community College stop by the Volunteer Center located in the Center Building.

Attention soft ball players

Softball Coach Mike Wisniewski is looking for softball players. Any former high school softball players interested in playing for ACC's softball team should contact Dean of Student Services Max Lindsay in his office in Van Lare Hall or call 356-9021, Ext. 200 to leave your name and home telephone number.

Alpena businesses feeling heat from little snow, snowmobilers

By Melissa Kennard
Staff Writer

The weather outside is frightful for some area businesses.

With snow totals trailing a foot behind last year at this time, area businesses are feeling the pinch of a poor snowmobiling season. Snowmobiling has become an increasingly popular sport and the money it brings in helps to boost northeastern Michigan's economy.

Lodges, stores and restaurants are feeling the loss of business. The Little Town Lounge in Lachine is feeling

the effects of the lack of snow. The restaurant counts on snowmobile traffic from a nearby trail that hasn't been used heavily this winter, said Vance Mills, the owner's son.

"We have only had a few snowmobiling customers, really not enough to speak of, which has brought a decline in business," Mills said.

He also mentioned that the last three winters have been slow in the winter because of little snow fall.

Local snowmobile dealers Sports Unlimited and Great Lakes Sport Center also complained of a decline in sales.

"It sucks," said Chris

Yokey, owner of Great Lakes Sport Center, about the weather.

Doreen Kriniak, a co-owner/sales associate for Sports Unlimited, tries to look at the bright side. During the winter of 1994 it snowed on Nov. 15 and kept snowing. As a result, sales rose dramatically that year.

"If you say you are sick, you will believe you are sick," she said. "If you think the weather is terrible, in turn you will believe it to be."

Kriniak says people should stay positive; if it snows, it snows.

If not, maybe next year.

*It's a Sweet Sale
At ACC's Bookstore!!
Don't forget that special valentine—*

*Long Stem Roses will be available
February 14th*

*We have a great selection of Jelly Belly
Valentine Candy (including sugar free),
Blue Mountain Valentine Cards & Books,
and cuddly critters!*

February 10th & 11th

*30% Off Clothing
(sale items excluded)*

