

**United Hebrew Geriatric Center Gerontechnology Program
Graduates First Class**
Seniors and Students Close the Digital Divide

New Rochelle, NY (June 14, 2006) -- In Westchester County, as well as across the nation, the senior population is growing. At the same time, the technology boom is creating a world that relies on computers for everything from purchasing groceries to driving a car. The problem is that seniors, the fastest growing population, often are not comfortable with the fastest growing technology.

The "digital divide," the gap between new technology and the ability to use (and sometimes afford) it, is greatest among seniors because many of them are intimidated by computers and reluctant to learn how to use them. The very group that could spend their leisure time emailing friends and family, shopping, and connecting with others in on-line communities often is unable to do so. However, older adults might be less fearful of computers if the computers were adapted to their needs.

The United Hebrew Geriatric Center of New Rochelle (UHGC) recently celebrated the graduation of the first students from its innovative gerontechnology program. The UHGC students began their computer classes in March of this year in a program that was created through the partnership of UHGC, Pace University's Ivan G. Seidenberg School of Computer Science and Information Systems and others in the newly formed Consortium for Multi-Faceted Gerontechnology Research. Each graduate received a certificate from representatives from Pace University and

Photo 1: Mayor Noam Bramson, New Rochelle, NY and Rita Mabli, Executive Vice President/CEO of United Hebrew Geriatric Center

Photo 2: Students and seniors working together at Willow Towers Assisted Living

Photo 3: Linda Forman, Director of Community Relations at United Hebrew Geriatric Center and Eli Weissberg, graduate and resident of United Hebrew Geriatric Center

Photo 4: Students and seniors learning at the Low-Savin Residence Soundview Apartments for Seniors

Photo 5: Graduating seniors at the ceremony held at United Hebrew Geriatric Center in New Rochelle, NY

Photo 6: Lizzie King and Evans Ihenachor taking a break from the computer

Photo 7: (l.) to (r.) Rita Mabli, Executive Vice President/CEO, United Hebrew Geriatric Center; Dr. Jean Coppola, Assistant Professor, Technology Systems, Pace University; Dr. Fran Gustavson, Intergenerational Computing course instructor, Pace University; Linda Forman, Director of Community Relations, United Hebrew Geriatric Center



enjoyed graduation cake and punch in the afternoon ceremony. Mayor Noam Bramson addressed the graduates in the ceremony that was covered by Regional News Network and News 12.

"We are so proud of these residents for overcoming their initial fear of computers and learning computer skills that we often take for granted, like emailing and looking up information on the Internet," said Rita Mabli, Executive Vice President/CEO of UHGC. "Our graduates feel a greater connection to the world at large and feel empowered with their new ability to communicate via computer."

Pace University students got an early jump on the project. Those in the Intergenerational Computing class worked directly with the seniors to help them feel comfortable with the computer, Internet, and email. Computer Hardware students refurbished, configured, and installed donated equipment, and assisted in maintenance.

The Pace University student instructors beamed with pride as they celebrated the success of their teaching. Pace Student Teacher Mayur Rana of Dobbs Ferry, NY said, "It was really great to see the seniors learning and doing new things. At first, they were a little afraid but we worked with them to ease their fears and encourage them to dig right in."

The next class for UHGC residents begins in the fall, with student teachers from two classes at Pace. Residents from UHGC's nursing home, assisted living facility, and senior housing all have the opportunity to take classes in computer labs in each building on the UHGC campus. A state-of-the-art UHGC residence, scheduled to be completed in 2007, will offer wireless Internet capacity in rooms and common



spaces. Rose Giannetto, a 91-year old UHGC resident said, "I signed up for the program because I heard that there was a veteran's memorial website and wanted to find a photo of my husband, a WWII veteran. I also wanted to learn how to e-mail my son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter."

It's never too late to learn. In fact, in today's fast-paced, computerized society, lifelong learning is essential. Older adults who learn how to use computers can open up a new world of browsing the Internet for news and information, emailing family and friends in far-away places, creating and sending greeting cards, writing to community leaders and government officials about issues of interest, and keeping up-to-date on health and medical information. In addition to gaining computer skills, they also benefit from the new relationships they formed with the students and faculty members of Pace University.

"This program enables our residents to interact with a team of students, faculty, and technical experts who are looking for ways to make computer technology easier for older adults to master," said Linda Forman, Director of Community Relations at United Hebrew Geriatric Center. "Seniors flourish in this program that allows them to interact with young adults and learn new and valuable computer skills."

Recently, United Hebrew Geriatric Center and Pace University were awarded a \$35,000 grant from IBM for software, services and support materials for web adaptive technology, which will reach individuals that have limited physical abilities and financial resources. The assistive software makes the Internet easier to read and use by magnifying letters on the computer screen, increasing the font size of text, reading text out loud, and assisting senior



users in other ways. It also can make keyboards more sensitive to the typing for people with arthritis, tremors, or partial paralysis.

For further information, please contact Linda Forman at 914.632.2804 x 224 or lforman@uhgc.org.

About the United Hebrew Geriatric Center of New Rochelle

UHGC is a vibrant not-for-profit, non-sectarian, multi-service senior living campus serving the Westchester metropolitan area since 1919. UHGC offers a rich array of skilled and community-based programs and services that encourages and supports a life of dignity and spirituality and promotes the highest possible quality of life. UHGC serves over 600 clients daily in its campus facilities -- Willow Towers, a 126 unit assisted living residence; a 270 bed Nursing Home; the 135 unit Low-Savin Apartments for seniors; a Long Term Home Health Care Program; and the Azor Home Health Agency. Its newest project, the renovation and expansion of its nursing home facility, combines world-class care with state-of-the-art features.

Website: www.uhgc.org

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