MEMORIAL TRIBUTE TO JIGGS CLARK
THE FOUNDING FATHER
OF SENIORNET OF PUGET SOUND, BELLEVUE, WASHINGTON

You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand. Woodrow Wilson, 28th President of the United State.

Those words sum up the life of Jiggs Clark, who passed away on October 26, 2009. He founded SeniorNet of Puget Sound (the third center in country) in 1986, was the Learning Center Coordinator for five years through 1991 and built a center that was a model for other learning centers established throughout the nation. He nursed it through those first five very lean years, and by dogged perseverance and the aid of other dedicated seniors, set it firmly on course. But it was a difficult learn-as-you-go process for all involved, with classes first held with two available computers, and students taking turns at the new wonder machines. With great perseverance, Jiggs was able to acquire additional computers and equipment and most important—additional volunteer instructors. None of this success would have been possible without the financial support of Dr. McIntyre who first heard about SeniorNet when attending an optometric association meeting in Hawaii. Dr Mac donated a large sum of money to get SeniorNet off the ground and even donated use of his vacant office space for a classroom.

Jiggs Clark indeed was the “spark” that set the flames in the creation of SeniorNet here in motion. As Jiggs told his alma mater, the Lakeside School in Seattle, “Life has not been the same”.

He is remembered for his big and funny hat and his big smile; for being the visionary guiding spirit; the support and encouragement he would send via emails and later in handwritten notes that were always filled with humor and his enthusiasm that never failed. And yes, he was still grumbling about the darn computer and how it wouldn’t work the way he wanted it to.

The story of how did this all happen?

"Back in 1986, it was only by chance that SeniorNet became a reality here. An investment consultant, Jiggs Clark, happened to pick up a magazine in his Bellevue office.

His interest aroused about those still relatively unknown computers, Jiggs was reading a magazine, known as A.P.P.L.E., dedicated to the sciences. No connection to those new Apple Computers. And Jiggs was a person interested in everything. The magazine featured an ad asking senior readers if they were interested in learning how to start an all-volunteer computer training program for other seniors. In those days, a very bold challenge. The ad was placed by the University of San Francisco's Technology Department, and was inviting seniors to take part in its new project, "Computers for Kids Over Sixty."

The project was researching how computers could enhance the lives of older adults. And when the ever-curious Jiggs (Always fondly referred to only by his first name) answered that ad, a new era for energetic seniors here was about to erupt. Jiggs, in 1986, was among the first 20 members of SeniorNet in the country.

That fateful magazine ad Jiggs spotted in 1986 included two paper color swatches, one yellow and the other red. Those responding were asked to return the red color if they already had a computer, and the yellow if they did not have a computer. Not only didn't he have a computer, he had yet to see his first real wonder machine. He wasn't even sure how it worked. What he did know was that the machine required electricity to operate. Jiggs sent back the yellow swatch, not knowing, not suspecting this reply would lead him into a new and exciting lifestyle.

A few weeks later, May 18, 1986, four big cartons were delivered to his office, one atop the other, measuring six feet high. Jiggs saw the name SeniorNet printed on the outside. This was the first, but not the last time he would see that name. This was a new organization. Clark started to open the cartons, saw it contained an Apple computer, plus the monitor and the printer. And oh, all those frightening wires.

Alarmed at all the cables and serious-looking fittings, he anxiously called the national headquarters in San Francisco, and spoke with the then head of the organization, Fran Middleton. He confessed he didn't have the slightest idea how to even start assembling the equipment. Over the phone, he pleaded, "What should I do with this?"

Back came the terse reply: "You compute!" And then she hung up. Clark always chuckled at the memory, and shook his head in disbelief.

This was the time that computers were just starting to emerge on the public conscious. There were such interesting stories about the mysterious and wonderful things that could be done with this electronic marvel. A methodical person, he went to work. After much studying and carefully and patiently reading the manuals, "I learned how to operate the equipment." Along with the computer were instructions for starting up a SeniorNet Computer Learning Center.

"It was an Apple2c, one of the first so-called laptops available. But, after you put the darned thing on your lap-- along with the adapter and the plug-in converter, and the cable connection to the printer, you were literally locked in place," Jiggs said. "Those guys in the ads who looked so casual holding the alleged laptop computer in their lap, with their feet up on the desk, really were as uncomfortable as anyone could be."

The national head and founder of SeniorNet in San Francisco, Dr. Mary Furlong, wrote of him: "Jiggs dedication, enthusiasm and wisdom served as a source of inspiration to me personally in those early days. Jiggs has a wonderful ability to learn continuously and is very strategic in his thinking." From the perspective of the growing national organization, Dr. Furlong added: Jiggs is one of the five people who have made the most difference.

Reading through the history and while preparing this, there seemed to be something that was compelling about this memorial. I think how Jiggs lived can best be summed up in the words of an American Poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson…

Finish every day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt have crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely and with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense. This day is all that is good and fair. It is too dear, with its hopes and invitations, to waste a moment on yesterdays.