

Profile of Willows SeniorNet Learning Center, San Jose CA

by John McCulloch and Joe Russo
updated August 2008

Beginnings

The roots of the Willows Learning Center lie deeply embedded in IBM. The Retirement Club of IBM San Jose tried to hold meetings to learn about personal computers at the company location. Often they were "bumped"



out of their meeting room by a pressing business need. The president of the IBM Retirement Club, Bill Souza, contacted a former colleague, Phil Carnahan, to ask him to lead an effort working with SeniorNet to start a computer learning center.



SeniorNet secured funding from IBM as well as Pacific Bell. In February 1993, Carnahan identified a centrally located Senior Center at Willows. Negotiations began, and in December a contract was approved by the San Jose City Council and SeniorNet.

During 1993 Phil had developed a list of potential volunteers, primarily IBM retirees. In January 1994, six IBM computers and printers were received and 35 volunteers were trained by SeniorNet's Dick Perkins and Joe Walton who held "Teach the Teachers" classes.



On March 9, 1994 the center held its registration which attracted 300 applicants of which only 120 were able to get seats in class. Ten classes in Introduction to Computers started the week of March 14, 1994. Registration for the first classes was on a first come, first serve basis.

A Grand Opening ceremony on March 25, 1994, hosted by the Senior Center Director, was attended by San Jose's Mayor, the local Councilman, Mary Furlong (Founder of SeniorNet), sponsor representatives and more than 100 others.

By May of 1995, the SNLC (SeniorNet Learning Center) had the largest membership of all of the then 55 SeniorNet Learning Centers with over 500 members. In May of 1996, the SNLC was still the largest of 75 SeniorNet Learning Centers with over 550 members. Currently there are over 600 members.

The volunteers of Willows SNLC today number over 100. They have been honored in 1996 with a Presidential Citation through the Points of Light Foundation. Other recognition has come from Governor Pete Wilson, Senator Diane Feinstein and Assemblyman Dominic Cortese. A commendation from the San Jose city council was received in 1995 and 2004. At the SeniorNet Annual Conference in May 1996, the Willows SNLC was honored as a "Flagship Center".

Our volunteer group continues to be very committed and the program will continue to provide

quality computer education to older adults.

Read the continued Willows profile: [Milestones and Innovations](#)

Willows Learning Center Website: <http://www.snicsj.org/willows>