

Seniors citizens discover the value of personal computing

By Bruce A. Love

It is never too late to learn and enjoy personal computing. Just ask Alice Wilson of Roaring Spring, Pennsylvania. She got her first computer for her 50th Wedding Anniversary. Today, at 84, Alice and her husband, Ed, celebrate their 56th anniversary, and they have both learned many valuable PC skills!

It used to be that only programmers, engineers, and other technical professionals used computers. However, many others are discovering the value and fun of learning some new tricks. Alice Wilson knows she is no expert in the use of computers (yet), but the great thing about computers is you don't have to be an expert to enjoy playing and learning with them!

What can one do with a personal computer? E-mail and other Internet uses are probably the greatest attraction for most seniors. Those who want to write their memoirs and record family history will want to use a word processing program (such as MS-Word or WordPerfect) and possibly a genealogical program (i.e. Family Tree Maker). Senior shoppers will also enjoy learning how to make secure and convenient purchases online, to avoid traffic and outrageous gas prices.

Alice Wilson learned to type 65 years ago, and now uses these skills typing letters and e-mail online. This is a slight advantage she has over her husband. Although technologically savvy, Ed never received typing instruction - it just wasn't something guys did in the old days. Still, Ed enjoys surfing the Internet for maps and other travel information. Even if you can only "hunt and peck" at the keyboard, it is still easy to surf the web for subjects and images of interest.

Do you want to show the grandchildren pictures and maps of places you served during World War II? It's easy! Go to Google (www.google.com), click on the "Images" tab, and type something like "Okinawa WWII" and click "Search." Even the slowest of typists can do this in under a minute. You will be rewarded with dozens of pictures representing links to pages all about that region during the war! From there, it is just a matter of clicking, reading, viewing, and learning! Do you have fond memories of the Kartoffelklosse your grandmother used to make? Search for "Kartoffelklosse recipe" and find various interpretations of this German potato dumpling!

The cost of personal computers has dropped dramatically in recent years. It is possible to get a very fine computer (including monitor, keyboard, mouse, and some useful software) for under \$600. You can get an excellent printer for well under \$100. If the cost of a PC is not in the budget, most libraries have PCs for your use.

Computers can be intimidating until you learn a few things about them. We have all been through this stage. The key is to get good instruction to make your computer your friend. Many school districts offer courses on the use of computers and the applications most often used with them. The Spring Cove School District, for example, has an impressive facility that houses several computer classrooms and regularly offers adult instruction on various introductory computer topics (Word Processing, Digital Photography, E-mail Basics, Internet Access, etc.). Most courses cost between \$10 and \$35. Contact "The Center" at (814) 224-7579 to find out what courses are available.

There is nothing magical about learning to use a PC. It just takes practice. After taking a course, or instruction from a friend, practice! Make mistakes (like the rest of us have), and learn from them. When you get stuck, call a friend, neighbor, or grandchild to assist you past the rough spots. The good news is, novices usually can't cause irreparable harm to a personal computer. Just keep it away from liquids and extremely dirty environments, and it will be just fine.

There are many good reasons to start computing - even in one's golden years. Staying in touch with friends and family is one good reason. PCs and the Internet have made this easier, quicker, and cheaper than ever before. Just ask Alice Wilson! Mrs. Wilson has communicated with loved ones and acquaintances in various corners of the world. She even has exchanged e-mails (including pictures) with missionary friends in Pakistan and Bolivia. Alice Wilson has grown so attached to her personal computer that she and her husband now take a laptop computer and a digital camera with them on vacations! I guess no matter what age we are, we will always like to show our friends how much fun we are having! Happy Anniversary Alice and Ed!

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