Service For The 21st Century

by Paul Hansen

As we at Project Headquarters were developing our new mascot, I came up with the tag line "Service for the 21st Century." At the time I simply thought that it "worked" with the robot and some other outreach materials that we were putting together for our June round of recruiting, but when I attended the Freedom to Connect Conference, I started thinking more about what it really meant.

...Because creation, collaboration and communication have always been central to the fight for economic and social justice, and these are the very points on which the economy and society are now pivoting. We have an incredible opportunity to upgrade our traditional means of engagment while connecting many more people with the new tools and knowledge that can result in meaningful, substantial, and profitable participation. This is what VISTA service in the 21st Century should be. It is what CTC VISTAs do everyday. The world needs more of it.

Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest

CTC VISTA Receives Grassroots "Techie" Award

by Peter Miller and Erin Taylor

On Friday, April 6, 2007, CTC VISTA received one of the first six Grassroots.org "Techie" Awards for innovation in nonprofit online software development at the National Nonprofit Technology Conference (NTC) in Washington DC.

"The quality of applications we received was astounding," notes Grassroots.org's Katie Winterbottom. "The CTC VISTA Project's application was particularly impressive. We are thrilled to honor the University of Massachusetts Boston and its College of Public and Community Service for sponsoring this work on the cutting edge of nonprofit technology."

"We are extremely proud to have received this prestigious honor," says CTC VISTA Project Director Paul Hansen. "This gives important visibility to our work as the most popular project in the entire AmeriCorps online recruitment system and shows why we're able to help so many organizations get the capacity-building support they need for their technology programs serving low-income and other disadvantaged communities."

The CTC VISTA Project received the Techie Award for its online application, management, support, and reporting system that incorporates guidance and feedback features especially useful to small, grassroots groups as well as larger applicant organizations meeting all the demands and requirements of the Corporation for National and Community Service for the first time.

At the Nonprofit Technology Conference with the Grassroots "Techie" tree statue and VISTA Leaders Danielle Martin and Ben Sheldon.

Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest

Creating Community Wireless Networks
by Ross Musselman

Active since 2000, the Champaign-Urban Community Wireless Network (CUWiN) Foundation is now supporting community-owned networks on the Mesa Grande Reservation in Southern California; in several neighborhoods in Chicago; in Urbana and Homer, Illinois; and in Apirede, Ghana, and Mamelodi, South Africa. The organization also organizes the International Summit for Community Wireless Networks (http://wirelesssummit.org/).

CUWiN's research and development efforts have produced wireless mesh networking software that is robust, fault-tolerant, and scalable, combining engineering, social policy, and common sense. Mesh technology maximizes the efficiency of peer-to-peer applications, like email and instant messaging programs. Built using open source technology, CUWiN network software is free and designed to run on the cheapest available hardware. One CUWiN node is one-seventh the cost of the leading mesh wireless solution.

CUWin Executive Director Sascha Meinrath looking down from a wireless network antenna.

Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest

Teaching High School Students Media Literacy
by Lauren Bratslavsky

...Six months into my year of service [at Media Bridges in Cincinnati], and here I am teaching a class of high school students about media literacy. I was anticipating an interesting and eye-opening class for these teens, full of experiential learning and thought-provoking questions. I've realized, however, there is a disconnect between the program I had envisioned and the program that teens are able to connect with. My knowledge and background were developed from a purely academic standpoint, and I needed to translate the information I had learned to a room full of teenagers who are admittedly influenced by television but not sure how, or even if they want, to affect the social influence of media.

Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest

Open Source Development and "Barrier To Entry"
by Cheryl Jerozal, NetCorps, Eugene, Oregon

Last week I had the opportunity to participate in my first "sprint." In a sprint, a group of people gets together and works on an open source project for a few days. In my two days (and one night) of sprinting, I learned a lot, met some awesome people, and contributed to the start of a project. I highly recommend sprinting to anyone who gets a chance to do it.

...What can we do to make it easier to contribute? Produce better documentation? (Lack of documentation is already a big problem in the open source world.) Set up more ways for programmers to connect to one another in person? Make better operating systems so tool setup goes more smoothly?

Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest

Xen: Creating Virtual Computers
from the blog of John Miller, Community Software Lab, Lowell, MA

Imagine that you could run Windows XP, Mac OS X, and multiple versions of Linux on the same computer. That's already a reality—you just have to reboot to switch between them. Now imagine that you could run all these operating systems at the same time on the same computer. You could run MS Word 2003 at the same time you're running Safari, all while programming in Eclipse. It's possible. The technology that makes it possible: Xen.

Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest

Free Tools For The Next Revolution

by Felicia Sullivan, Organizers' Collaborative, Boston, MA

When talking about free software, a long-time colleague of mine always says, "You know, free as in speech not free as in beer." That is to say, free software is about liberty not price. And when speaking about open source software, he refers to transparency and accessibility of the code that allows anyone to create and be involved. He marvels that both free and open source software (F/OSS) share the common dependency upon communities of developers and users to thrive — the ultimate "gift culture" in his estimation.

These concepts of freedom, transparency, accessibility, creativity, and inclusion should sound familiar to those of us working in communities. They are the foundations of much of the work involved in social change. Therefore, we owe it to ourselves and to our communities to explore and be open to free and open source software. These applications may benefit our organizations and our citizens not because they cost so little, but because they provide us ultimate autonomy over our own futures in the realm of communications. They ensure that the workings of the system remain knowable and accountable. They prevent us from being dependent on outside forces and put us in the driver seat. Controlling the code is the contemporary equivalent of controlling the core processes of democratic participation.

Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest

Copyright: Is It Still About the Content?

by Reebee Garofalo, College of Public and Community Service, University of Massachusetts Boston

...We are currently engaged in righteous battles to "save access" and "save the Internet" which seek to protect such hard won principles as local self-determination in the franchising process and the preservation of network neutrality for all public communication.

I want to suggest that if we look farther into the future and view these struggles as broadly cultural rather than narrowly technological, the biggest challenges facing the community media and technology movements are not going to be about funding, technical development, or infrastructure; they are going to be about access and use— and I am not talking here about access to the network itself, I'm talking about access to and use of the resources and products that comprise our culture. We are in a period of unprecedented privatization of knowledge and information and systematic restrictions on access and use. Battles of this nature get waged on the terrain of that oxymoron called "intellectual property," more specifically, copyright law...

Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest

The CTC VISTA Project swore in 20 VISTAs at our PreService Orientation in January. The Project now has over 60 VISTA members serving in 18 states across the country (see www.ctcvista.org/directory).

From Left to Right, Back Row: Derek Maxwell, Ramon Myers, Mike Moore, Aaron Chalek, Brent Barker, Larry Gaither, Karl Hedstrom, Mike Matthews, Eric Bryant, Ben Sheldon
Middle Row: Dan Chen, Elisha Durrant, Catherine Moore, James Carlson, Kevin Bulger, Raymond Verona
Front Row: Aliya Abbasi, Julie Bohnlein, Leena Silverman, Shirley Washington, Doreen Young, Dana Sou, Naomi Jimenez, Danielle Martin

Reaching Out To Those Who Are Underserved

by Meredith Aalto, Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston

If technology centers want to reach out to become more accessible to people with disabilities they should consider these questions when conducting outreach and recruitment in traditionally underserved communities:

• Is the technology center recognizable in the neighborhood? For example, does the signage display a name and a picture with a computer on it? Is the text written in languages that most people in the neighborhood understand? Is the technology center near transportation? Does the phone number include a TTY (Teletypewriter) number? I know of a deaf person who wanted to contact a technology center and did not know how to use email. There was no TTY number listed for the center, so she never went in to check it out.

• Is there information about the technology center disseminated in public places such as local grocery stores, beauty shops, barbershops, laundromats, doctors' offices, employment offices and local disability providers, for example, assisted living centers? Are program flyers going home through the local schools? Do local radio stations and newspapers advertise the technology center? Are people with disabilities being represented in marketing materials?

Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest

Musings On The Digital Divide

from the blog of Kevin Bulger, Collins Center for Public Policy, Miami, FL

...What does the Digital Divide mean? Why does it matter? To whom or what does it refer to? How does the divide close? How would you know when it's closed? What does the solution(s) look like? How can you tell if a solution is appropriate for a specific geographic area? How do you measure the successes or failures of a solution? Does the Digital Divide only apply to people or to organizations as well? What kind of people does the Digital Divide target? What kind of organizations?

...The Digital Divide does matter, but I feel there needs to be a consensus as to what exactly the Digital Divide refers to and how to best solve it. As I stand right now, the Digital Divide refers to the difference in communication-technology skill sets that exist between the most adept users and all the rest. The name Digital Divide implies 'haves' and 'have nots'...

Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest

Integrating New Tech Tools Into Nonprofits

by Jessica Rothschuh, The Children's Partnership, Santa Monica, CA

I haven't always been a techie. Maybe I'm not really a techie now, but as a CTC VISTA, I felt I had a responsibility to *know* technology. Fresh from journalism school, I was a Google whiz but had never learned HTML or Web design — two skills I found tucked inside my job description. I'd like to say I made a valiant effort; I read Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, set up a MySpace account, started a blog, created a Second Life avatar, began paying attention to Technorati (the blog search engine), and even taught myself HTML.

After becoming familiar with some of the more popular open-source technology tools available, I began working them into my organization's operations. The Children's Partnership staff adopted some tools more easily than others. Even though I saw the utility of each new technology I chose, learning to use another tool or add an extra step to a process daunted some of my coworkers.

Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest

"Until we have an army of dedicated, tech-savvy, nonprofit capacity building robots... CTC VISTA — Service for the 21st Century. JOIN US!"

"CTC VISTA — Using technology to fight poverty and other formidable opponents since 2000."

"CTC VISTA — Looking for more of a challenge? Volunteer."

CTC VISTA posters designed by Paul Hansen