COMPUTER WINDOW TO THE WORLD PORTSMOUTH STUDENTS ARE MAKING E-MAIL, CHAT ROOMS AND AN ONLINE BULLETIN BOARD THAT ALLOWS THEM TO CHECK ON THEIR HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS PART OF THEIR DAILY ROUTINES.<

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MIKE MARSHALL, 13, spent the first half of his summer vacation sweating over a lawn mower, cutting lawns so he could spend the second half of the summer surfing. Rather than catching a wave,

however, Mike will be surfing the Internet on the new computer he is building with the profits from his odd jobs.

Two weeks ago, Mike visited a computer show and found the components to build his own computer.

``I bought a mother board, eight megs of RAM and a tower, enough to get started,'' said Mike, a rising freshman at Wilson High School.

He will borrow whatever other components he needs until he saves the money to buy his own.

Mike is one of scores of Portsmouth students whose computer skills and interests tend to awe less technology attuned adults. E-mail, chat rooms and news groups are part of the youngsters' daily routine, with most of them viewing their computer window to the world with affectionate familiarity.

Mike, a former Hunt-Mapp Middle School student, honed his computer skills at school. Last year, he, as well as hundreds of other city students, became familiar with PEIC, the Portsmouth Education and Information Center, a bulletin board networking service that is available to all students and teachers in the system.

By the end of the year, PEIC should also be accessible from every school in the city, according to Bob Wright, Portsmouth technology resource teacher and PEIC's initial developer.

PEIC was established a year ago with funds from three magnet programs: Douglass Park Earth

and Space program, Hunt-Mapp Aerospace program and I.C. Norcom Science Technology program. Last spring, Portsmouth became the first South Hampton Roads school district, and possibly the first in the state, to have a bulletin board service online to the Internet and available to all students and teachers.

Virginia statewide standards of learning recognize computer technology skills as essential components of every student's education and set minimum competencies that students should acquire. For example, students as young as fifth-graders should demonstrate a basic understanding of computer theory as well as basic keyboarding and computer communication skills.

PEIC was designed to help Portsmouth students meet the standards of learning. Through PEIC, students can E-mail anywhere in the world, access news groups, establish their own home page on the Internet and even check on their homework assignments.

Before Christmas, Douglass Park Elementary students used PEIC's capability to communicate between schools when they wrote their own computer letters to Santa Claus, E-mailing them to Hunt-Mapp where older students anonymously answered the letters for Santa and E-mailed them back to Douglass Park.

Students at Norcom and Hunt-Mapp also have cooperated in mutual projects via E-mail. When PEIC was in its earliest test phase, Wright worked with a small test group of Norcom students who corresponded via E-mail with students in Great Britain and Chicago.

``Kids are much more eager to do projects on the computer than to do research in the library,'' Wright said.

Sean Johnson, a 1996 Churchland High School honor graduate and aspiring chef, spent time on his home computer every day. Last winter, he used PEIC to find the culinary school he wanted to attend after graduation.

``Any topic you want is on the Internet,'' he said. ``I think it's cool that you can learn without even leaving your home.''

PEIC also has allowed students to carry their computer training off school grounds. Early in May, Wright led a field trip to Virginia Beach's Back Bay Refuge, where 11 eighth-graders from Hunt-Mapp camped overnight and spent hours performing environmental studies and experiments in the refuge.

In addition to sleeping bags, tents and grills, the students also packed a lap-top computer so they could transmit their research data through PEIC back to Hunt-Mapp, where they and other students would use the information for further classroom study. Highlights of the trip were documented in photos taken by the students with a digital camera and downloaded into their computer.

``The Internet capabilities made possible by PEIC will help our students into high school and college,'' said Linda Ridenour, Hunt-Mapp magnet program facilitator. ``These young people will also grow to know that power comes from knowledge rather than fancy shoes and cars.''

Ridenour projected that in the future PEIC will be used not only as a citywide information-sharing service but also as a worldwide research and communication tool, capturing images from weather satellites and space stations, communicating with researchers in Antarctica or

astronauts on a space mission, or discussing subject matter long distance with an expert in that field.

Locally, businesses, professionals and community services can be tapped as future classroom resources via PEIC.

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