

"I learned a lot of things today that I didn't know before."

- Bill Roulette of Woodland Hills, who received computer instruction from Carmel High School students



Carole Bestor receives iPad instruction from Carmel High junior Carly Rudiger, 17, at The Carmel Foundation. VERN FISHER/The Herald

## Tech-savvy teens teach Seniors computer basics

STUDENTS LAUNCH MENTORING CLUB AT CARMEL HIGH

By DENNIS TAYLOR *Herald Staff Writer*

Understanding an ever-evolving world can be an overwhelming challenge for older adults, many of whom feel hopelessly left behind in an environment dominated by smartphones and laptop technology.

A small group of students — teens who have never known a world without computers — have launched "Wired for Connections/Mentor Up," a club at Carmel High School designed to help senior citizens understand the basics of modern-day devices and bridge what they perceive as an inter-generational divide.

Sean Butler, a 16-year-old sophomore, initiated the program two years ago, offering to share his own knowledge in 45-minute, one-on-one mentoring sessions with members of the Carmel Foundation who want to learn more about the workings of computers and smartphones, and the possibilities now available via the Internet.

Butler was joined at the beginning of this school year by Carly Rudiger, a 17-year-old junior who took his concept to another level, creating a full-fledged club at Carmel High. They currently oversee a group of about 15 classmates who, in exchange for community-service credits, volunteer regularly to share what they know with any Carmel Foundation member who signs up for the free program. The waiting list has close to 50 names.

"I was probably 5 years old the first time I sat down at a computer," Butler said.

"It didn't take me long to start figuring things out because I wasn't afraid to play. It's easier to learn technology if you're not afraid of



Carmel High sophomore Sean Butler, 16, helps Bill Roulette with an iPad at the Carmel Foundation

Tech mentoring for seniors

The Carmel Foundation offers free, 45-minute, one-on-one mentoring sessions to members who would like to learn more about their home computers, laptops, Androids, smart phones, or virtually any other tech device. The volunteer mentors are students from Carmel High's "Wired for Connections/Mentor Up" club. For more information, contact Kimberly Willison, director of development for The Carmel Foundation, at 620-8701 or email [kwillison@carmelfoundation.org](mailto:kwillison@carmelfoundation.org)

it, and what holds a lot of older people back is that they're

afraid they're going to mess something up if they play around and experiment.

They don't realize that most of the time you can just undo what you just did and get back to the place that you want to be."

Seniors register for the classes (usually held on Saturday), bring their device — an iPhone, Android, iPad, laptop or virtually anything else about which they'd like to learn more — and receive hands-on instruction from their young mentors.

"I don't come with my own agenda," Rudiger said. "They ask me questions — how to do this or that — and I try to help them

understand as many of those things as possible during our 45-minute session. I try not to overwhelm them with too much information because they can come back for as many sessions as they want."

Before entering the mentoring program, the Carmel High contingent goes through "sensitivity training," which, among other things, includes activities designed to help them better understand their aging pupils.

"One thing we did, for example, was smear a pair of glasses with Vaseline, so we could get an idea of what it might be like to have the kind of vision problems that some older adults live with every day," Rudiger said. "We also taped fingers together, and put tape over fingertips, to try to replicate problems they might have with their hands. It can be frustrating to watch how slowly some of them are when they try to type, but the sensitivity training taught us that typing can be very difficult if your fingertips are numb."

The graying "students" say they tend to learn much more during one-on-one instruction than they do in group classes they've tried. The fresh-faced "mentors" engage with a generation of people they barely knew before.

"I mentored a 93-year-old guy one day who started telling me about a Jewish kid he knew back in high school, right before World War II," Butler recounted. "I guess the kid got bullied a lot, and this man used to protect him.

"So I helped him find an article about his old friend online, and his reaction was really cool," he said. "It was pretty amazing for him to discover what his old friend became, and that made it exciting for me. We even found an email address so he could reconnect with his friend after all these years, which made him very happy."

Carole Bestor, a 69-year-old hairdresser from Pacific Grove, received an iPad from her husband as a gift, but never used it until she sat down with Rudiger for a pair of 45-minute sessions at the Carmel Foundation. Her eyes widened and sparkled as her mentor helped her discover the possibilities of the device.

"It was really exciting to learn how to use email. I've always been a person who sends a letter or a card through the mail, but now I can email my daughter, and also my girlfriend, who I went to high school with," she said. "But I think the most exciting thing I learned about was Pandora, a place on

the Internet where I can listen to music by anybody I like. I listened to Adele and Jennifer Lopez today."

Rudiger also helped Bestor discover that her tablet has a camera, and showed her how to use it. Together, they took a selfie.

Bestor, an artist, then learned how to surf the Internet to find hundreds of photos of Monet's garden in Paris, something she's longed to see all her life.

Carmel resident Ellyn Gelson, 69, and her 79-year-old friend, Bill Roulette of Woodland Hills, brought a higher level of tech savvy into the same session (she's owned a computer since 1997 and once had a Palm Pilot; he still uses the first-generation iPad), but got a worthwhile education from Butler and 17-year-old Carmel High senior Caroline Lahti.

"I learned a lot of things today that I didn't know before," Roulette said. "I discovered how to access the app store, and how to maneuver around the different applications. I found out how to get rid of stuff I don't want anymore. And these kids taught me how to use my iPad to email photos, and also to Skype. I never realized I could do those things."

The teen mentors are two-time recipients of a \$1,000 grant from the American Association of Retired Persons, which this year included an all-expense-paid trip for Butler and Rudiger to AARP headquarters in Washington, D.C.

"I can honestly say that I feel like I've learned more during these sessions than I've taught," Rudiger said. "I mean, obviously they're taking in all this information, and hopefully applying it every day, but, for me, just talking with them and learning their stories is what draws me back every time. I love having those conversations."

Dennis Taylor can be reached at [dtaylor@montereyherald.com](mailto:dtaylor@montereyherald.com) or 646-4344



Bill Roulette operates an iPad as he and Ellyn Gelson, right, are assisted by Sean Butler, 16, at The Carmel Foundation. VERN FISHER/The Herald