

Free Geek helps the needy get nerdy

By Charity Prater

The Free Geek Community Technology Center has been helping to fight environmental waste and computer illiteracy since 2000. Through community donations, they collect aged computers, recycle the parts that are no longer working, reuse the parts that still function, and build refurbished computers that are given to charitable organizations and volunteers for Free Geek.

Alison Briggs is the volunteer coordinator for Free Geek who started out as a volunteer to earn herself a computer before retaining a permanent position. "This place is great because all you have to do to learn is come in and keep showing up," Briggs says. She has been working for the organization for over a year and a half.

Free Geek has two programs in which people can earn a free computer. The first is the Computer Adoption Program where a volunteer can donate 24 hours of their time helping the organization clean, take apart computers for recycling, or unload deliveries of electronics, among many other jobs, to earn their free, refurbished desktop. The rebuilt computer also comes with a year of free tech support and free classes for the recipient on how to use their new computer.

The second program is the Computer Building Program. This program is for volunteers who are more computer savvy and are willing to build six computers for Free Geek from their stock pieces and then build a final one for themselves.

"No matter what situation you are in, your abilities or experience," says Briggs, "you are welcome here. We accept everyone."



■ Volunteer coordinator Alison Briggs (right) teaches a class on the Linux OS to a group of recent Burmese immigrants. PHOTO BY JASON E. NAPLAN

Free Geek accepts computers in any physical condition. Broken computers and computers older than a Pentium II or Apple Power PC cost more in processing; therefore, a voluntary \$10 donation fee is requested.

The organization is always looking for more volunteers. A short tour is required before beginning volunteer work. They are looking for more electronics donations and monetary donations, if people want to help other than by supplying their time.

"In 2006, there were approximately 1,700 volunteers who logged more than 54,000 hours," says Briggs. "Additionally, through our Hardware Grants Program, Free Geek provides computers to local nonprofits and

community organizations that lack funding to purchase such equipment. Free Geek grants approximately 40 to 60 computers a month through this program."

Tours for volunteers are offered Tuesday through Saturday at noon and 6 p.m. and anyone interested in touring can simply show up at Free Geek.

Free Geek, 1731 SE 10th Ave., (503) 232-9350, info@freegeek.org. More information about the organization can be found on their website at www.freegeek.org or search for "Welcome to Free Geek" on YouTube to see a video presentation.