

Computer recycler gives itself an upgrade

By **SCOTT HEWITT**
Columbian staff writer

Not afraid of mice, are you?

Don't be embarrassed to admit it — many people are. Especially senior citizens who have never held a mouse and students who can't afford one.

That's why CREAM — Computer Reuse, Education and Marketing — is offering free computer education classes and a free Internet cafe in central Vancouver. It's there for folks who have never manipulated a computer mouse, traversed the globe via the Internet, or sent anybody an e-mail.

"We want to give free education away," said executive director Oso Martin. "We want you to have a computer, not an expensive paperweight."

On Saturday morning, CREAM unveiled its new digs at 5000 East Fourth Plain Boulevard, alongside Albertsons and the new Habitat for Humanity ReStore, CREAM's partner in keeping decent secondhand



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

Executive director Oso Martin prepares a presentation for the grand opening of CREAM, a computer education center and Internet cafe. CREAM is a nonprofit company that recycles, refurbishes, resells or donates used computers to the needy.

stuff out of landfills. ReStore does it with building materials; CREAM, which shares the Re-

Store's space, does it with computers.

Donated computers arrive at

CREAM

- **WHAT:** Computer Reuse, Education and Marketing — a nonprofit computer school and Internet cafe.
- **WHERE:** 5000 E. Fourth Plain Blvd.
- **WHY:** To keep discarded computers out of the landfill by recycling them or returning them to use.
- **PRICE:** Free.
- **CONTACT:** 360-735-0888 or upgradeyourcommunity.org.
- **TO GET A FREE COMPUTER:** Call the Salvation Army, 360-694-9503.
- **INTERNET CAFE OPEN:** 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.
- **CREAM OPEN:** 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday.

CREAM's workshop and thrift store in the ReStore space. They're tested by volunteers

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and students from Clark College's vocational training program. The truly hopeless are disassembled and prepared for recycling — CREAM gets 20 percent of its income by selling these recyclables on the market — but computers with a future are refurbished and either handed over to the Salvation Army, which distributes them for free to the needy, or sold for well-below-market prices at the CREAM thrift store. Those computers are loaded up with basic Microsoft software.

CREAM was born nearly a decade ago, according to Jim Mansfield of Clark County Public Works, as the federal government started considering the question of hazardous electronic waste — like mercury, cadmium and lead — in discarded computers. The city of Vancouver and Clark County started discussing ways to recycle electronic waste rather than throwing it away. The first collection brought in enough discarded electronics to fill two 50-foot trailer trucks. The next step, Mansfield said, was seeing how much of it could be returned to use.

"We started wondering, what if we brought together the recycling and re-use sides," he said.

CREAM was born as a county-driven program. And over the next six years, more than 230 computer units were refurbished and given to people who needed them. All told, 4 million pounds of electronic junk was diverted from the waste stream and recycled or returned to use.

Because of changes in state law, CREAM has now spun off as a private nonprofit — working with \$330,000 in start-up funding from the city and county, Martin said. It's looking to raise about \$50,000 more to keep remodeling its new space — adding an actual classroom, as well as more computers and stipends for instructors. Plus, a big sign.

Martin said there are 100 computers in the CREAM pipeline right now. That's many times CREAM's old rate of processing, he said.

"It's great to see this stuff going out to people who can't afford it," said John Walway, a Clark College student and computer helpdesk worker. "If both sides of the fence aren't getting their hands on technology, some are going to get left way behind."

Right now, the education CREAM offers is basic Internet literacy for the mouse-fearing — how to do e-mail, how to move around the World Wide Web, how to post pictures or résumés online.

"Especially for senior citizens who are a little afraid of technology and they're just trying to get over that barrier," he said.

Rory Bowman said the local Macintosh users group, called Apple Van, will begin meeting at CREAM. His mother, Glenna, said she's ready to sign up as an instructor.

Vancouver Mayor Royce Polard said the CREAM program is a winner on many levels. It

provides computer training for students and job seekers, a free space for eager learners, and a shot in the arm for the Fourth Plain corridor — one of the city's biggest revitalization targets.

"Right now, not far from here, there are a whole lot of teenagers sleeping," he said. "They're going to find out that they've got access to the whole world right here. What better place to do it?"

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