

## THE MOBILE CYBER CLASSROOM

When community partners met in 2006 to discuss adult education opportunities for Grand Isle and neighboring towns, they came up with the idea of a mobile classroom.

Having no high school and little on-island adult education choices available to many residents were going off-island for training. Community partners came up with the idea of a mobile classroom as a possible solution. The idea became more compelling as they realized the benefits it could bring to many community businesses and neighboring towns.

Lake Champlain Islands Chamber of Commerce, along with the expertise and abilities of Adult Educator, Darcy Coates, Director of CyberCottage, a computer and internet training organization in Grand Isle, VT, worked together to evolve the mobile classroom idea into a reality.

Most people, when they think of a mobile classroom envision a bus or some other modified vehicle, such as a mobile library that travels from place-to-place to deliver it's wares. The mobile classroom, which is really a large rolling case that can hold seven wireless capable laptops, a mobile hub, and a notebook (a device designed specifically for internet use), and still



Darcy Coates, demonstrates how laptops are packed into the multiple laptop travel case.



Laptops, on their ergonomic stands, in the CyberCottage classroom.

fit in a car trunk, is used to transport equipment to the learning group.

Students can also enroll for training at the CyberCottage classroom located at the Grand Isle Industrial Park.

Darcy partnered with the Lake Champlain Islands Chamber of Commerce to develop the mobile classroom and curriculum offerings. The Lake Champlain Islands Chamber of Commerce's Executive Director, Ruth Wallman, pursued the financing needed for the mobile lab. With a \$29,788 Rural Business Enterprise

Grant from USDA Rural development and funding from other partners, the mobile classroom launched its new mobile classroom with an open house ceremony.

Attending the ceremony was David Gardner, a South Hero, VT resident and a student at CyberCottage. Mr. Gardner, disabled from a work related injury, can no longer work in his trade as a pipefitter. With little computer skills, he is participating in the training programs to build his computer and internet skills in an effort to become self-employed. With limited mobility, the skills David gains from this local resource, will allow him to work from home. During the open house ceremony, Mr. Gardner shared with the group his admiration for the instructor, Darcy Coates, and how the training opportunities at CyberCottage has helped him to pull himself up from an otherwise down and out situation created by his injury. He looks forward to his upcoming October class.

Also attending the open house, was Catherine Jette. Catherine works for the State of Vermont's Reach Up Program. She attended the event to see, first hand, the set-up. Ms. Jette will work closely with the CyberCottage, referring Reach Up participants to the courses offered at the CyberCottage classroom or through the mobile-classroom,

The creation of the mobile classroom will not only help Grand Isle county residents become more qualified for employment by developing or expanding their computer skills, it is creating employment for instructors. A portion of the USDA Rural Development RBEG funds will be used to pay instructor fees. Currently, four instructors, paid by the class, are lined up to train participants on web design, internet use, and basic email skills. One of the instructors, Teri Geney, proprietor of WordCraft Marketing Communications, helped design the CyberCottage logo and to market the mobile classroom program. Teri will be teaching web-design from the mobile classroom. Teri said she has volunteered her services numerous times to the Lake Champlain Islands Chamber of Commerce members. Although work is volunteer, the exposure creates employment opportunities in the long run. Sometimes it takes a while for someone she provided training to, but when the time comes they need the skills or assistance she offered free through the Chamber, they come to her.



Teri Geney, a CyberCottage instructor stands next to the CyberCottage logo she was hired to design.

The goal of CyberCottage and the Chamber was to have at least 300 class hours scheduled. At 110% enrollment, the program has exceeded that goal, with participants enrolled in one or more classes. Partnering with the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC), eligible participants can take computer training and other courses for free with a VSAC non Degree grant.

“USDA Rural Development looks at ways to pull projects together, allowing communities to build stronger projects.” said David Robinson, USDA Rural Development’s Business Program Director. “The regional approach to problem solving and economic development demonstrated by Lake Champlain Islands Chamber of Commerce, VSAC, and CyberCottage, has done this.”

What is next for the mobile classroom? LCICC will now start working with local businesses to determine how CyberCottage can work with them to train meet their employees computer training needs on-site using the mobile classroom.