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# Cyber seniors Older adults learn new technology

By Andrea Hall  
Lifestyles Editor

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When Janie Dale, 91, of Greenwood was given her first computer eight years ago, she was ready to pitch it out the window within the first two weeks.

"I got stuck on something, and it was so frustrating," she said. "I really didn't have anyone to help me figure it out other than a tidbit here and there."

The computer was a gift from her daughter in St. Louis. Like many older adults interested in learning new technology, such as e-mail and cell phones, Dale hoped it would help her stay in touch with her children and grandchildren.

"I have three daughters who live in Vicksburg, Jackson and St. Louis, and their children live in Hattiesburg, Oxford, Atlanta, Pensacola and St. Louis," she said. "Then, I have my sons who live in Mississippi, and one of their children lives in South Carolina."

Add cousins who live everywhere from Virginia to New Orleans, and suddenly she has a lot of people to keep track of. She said the main use for the computer was to enable her to send e-mails.

She grew up in the generation that conquered outer space, but cyberspace was a whole new challenge.

"I would sit down and type a message, but I didn't send them right," Dale said. "The e-mails never went though."

Although she no longer remembers where she was going wrong, Dale was determined to send an e-mail. "There is so much good information out there, and it is an effective way for communicating," she said.

Since getting the hang of e-mailing her family, Dale has used her technical skills to enhance a ministry close to her heart at First United Methodist Church - prayer concerns.

"Prayer is the foundation of the church," she said. "By forming a prayer ministry that communicates through e-mail, we are able to get the word out more quickly instead of having to wait until the next time we see each other."

The prayers are received from the congregation and the community and sent out to each of Dale's prayer warriors. During the week, if any additional prayers are needed, Dale can update her team with just a few clicks on the computer.

"I can send them an 'urgent prayer' if someone in the community dies or something happens to our men and women fighting overseas," she said.

Dale's excitement about learning new technology and sharing it with the congregation brought a traditional ministry to a new level. Sitting next to Dale's monitor is a little metal girl praying on her knees. It reminds her of the great things she can do with e-mail, which is called Knee-mail.

"I am glad I persevered," Dale said. "It's instant communication with both of my families. It has been such a joy."

### Learning at any age

John Giesemann of the Mississippi State University Extension Service hopes to help other older adults learn how technology can enhance their lives, whether it is staying in touch with family or giving them skills to return to work.

He has been traveling across the state for 25 years teaching people how to do everything from opening a program and saving a file to sending e-mails and uploading pictures.

"I teach a lot of senior citizens because for a lot of them, they have just been given their first computer by the children or grandchildren," Giesemann said. "Unlike kids, they need someone to go step by step with them while they learn or they will get frustrated."

That's something Dale could relate to during her early weeks of using her computer.

During his classes, Giesemann repeats steps and uses clever word rhymes, such as "orange or blue and one little click will do, and if one little click don't do, try two."

What does a right click do?

After taking a class with Giesemann in Carrollton on Wednesday, Shirley Poe, 63, knows it opens a menu. Poe, who said she didn't even know how to type, was excited about connecting in a new way.

"My husband has a computer and talks to his old friends and does social networking," Poe said. "My grandchildren use all



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My husband has a computer and talks to his old friends and does social networking," Poe said. "My grandchildren use all of these electronic gadgets, and I am technologically illiterate."

By the time Poe left, she had learned to open a Word document, type a paragraph and save it.

"If someone has reasonable knowledge and a desire to learn new technology, they can learn at any age," Giesemann said.

The key is that they have to want to learn.

#### Getting used to change

Lisa Moon, 50, decided to learn how to use a computer in order to help her get a job, but her digital camera has been sitting unused since she unwrapped it for Christmas last year.

"It's like Greek to me," said Moon of Minter City. "I won't take the time to sit down and learn."

Moon admits that it is hard to overcome the challenge of something new because she doesn't particularly like change.

"I get used to doing things the same way, and I like that," she said. "I can read the instruction book, but I don't understand what it is saying."

Giesemann agrees that manuals can be confusing.

"Unlike the children I teach, adults are more timid to experiment with trying something new without understanding everything about it," he said.

Moon is making strides to learn how to use the computer and also has a cell phone.

"I learned to text on my phone because it was the best way to talk to my daughter," Moon said. "It wasn't hard to learn once I stopped mashing the buttons down."

The digital camera is still collecting dust on Moon's shelf for now, but Giesemann said his digital camera classes are some of the most popular.

"The older folks love to take pictures," Giesemann said. "A lot of them know to go down to Wal-Mart to have them printed, but I can teach them to send pictures in e-mails to share with their family and friends who live somewhere else."

It is not just about the possibly to communicate, although that does help many seniors stave off the isolation, but to continue challenge their minds.

Josephine Leflore, 80, and Ann Gray, 83, are thirsty for new information, and the Internet is a way to keep learning.

Just the act of learning the computer helps keep their minds active.

"I felt like the world was leaving me behind," Leflore said.

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[Janie Dale got her first computer when she was 83 years old. Eight years later, she uses its e-mail capabilities to enhance her church's prayer ministry. \(Photo by Andrea Hall\)](#)

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" That's my Mom! Always willing to do what it takes to learn new things. And she uses it in service to God and to her church and community. And it is a blessing for us to be able to communicate with her via email. Because our family is stretched out all over the place, email is a way we can share the little things in life, not just the big ones, on an almost daily basis. And we're grateful!  
Mary Hughes, St. Louis "

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