

Find It! Shoot It! Shop It!

Connecting Teens to Technology at La Puente Library

By Monique Delatte

The name of our city, La Puente, translates to “the bridge.” The La Puente Library is very much a bridge between an exciting, growing, majority Latino community of recent immigrants and the technological resources and learning tools that today’s libraries can offer new citizens.

According to the 1999–2000 U.S. Census, this community is 83 percent Latino, and more than three-quarters of the citizens of La Puente speak a language other than English at home. The U.S. Census Bureau reports higher-than-average poverty rates and low education levels here, which are a challenge to community supports. Fully one-third of La Puente residents over the age of twenty-five have less than a ninth-grade education.¹

What do these statistics mean for the teens of La Puente? The good news is that many teens preserve their Latino cultural heritage, spending free time learning folklórico dancing for quinceañeras or helping with the preparation and cooking

for large family events. Practicing these traditional arts is important in the social development of teens. Yet the time that teens spend dancing with friends is time not spent learning about technology. Tech-savvy youths are those who will have more choices about their futures. Many of our young adult patrons and volunteers are intimidated by technology. Tasks such as downloading photographs from a digital camera can be challenging because of the novelty of the many small steps involved.

To help teens become more familiar with La Puente Library’s available technology, young adults enjoyed a series of basic classes for Teen Tech Week (TTW). To advertise the programs, I visited local middle and high schools, providing information literacy (IL) classes and flyers. There is also a core group of thirty regular participants who are Young Adult Board members.

The goal of the program was to familiarize the young adults of La Puente with basic technology skills. There were four main objectives:

- Present online searching options for attaining reliable information sources
- Familiarize teens with e-shopping for books
- Teach young adults digital photography skills
- Provide a tutorial in the setup of gaming equipment and share gaming tips

On our opening day, March 4, TTW kicked off with a digital photography class for teens. Participants received photography tips and a brief overview of the contributions of influential Latin photographers and artists. Teens then formed groups and went outside of the library to take digital pictures lit by sunlight and shaded by the natural environment. Local artist Roxana Torres guided the teens for twenty minutes, then taught them how to upload their pictures. High school junior

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Teens not only learned from the La Puente Library's exciting series of programs during Teen Tech Week, they also had tons of fun and won cool prizes! From front: Kayla Kim (age 16), Valerie Garcia (age 12), Stefany Godoy (age 12), John Kim (age 18), Monique Delatte (librarian), and behind Kayla's shoulder is Wendy Villalobos (age 16)

Sara Gomez said she "loved it." Preteen Guadalupe Robles agreed: "I like it here because you get to find out about cameras."

On Wednesday, the young adults assembled a digitally produced photo album of pictures from the preceding day for the YA collection. Teens worked on the album every day, adding new pictures from each event, then organized the album on Saturday. Teens also shot pictures of the families attending story time and helped the young participants create frames for their new family photos with Flip-Flap Jack, a flannel board character made of breakfast foods. This project allowed teens to practice the photography skills they learned the day before and share this knowledge with the storytime families. Joanne Mata, an eighth grader, mused, "It's pretty awesome. I got to meet new people." Pictures of Wednesday's events were featured in a front-page story

in the local paper. John Kim, a "volunteer" since 2004, told *San Gabriel Valley Tribune* reporter Claudia Palma that he "learned a lot about what websites are good for uploading and sharing pictures, and for research."

On Thursday, teens participated in an IL class, followed by an intense scavenger hunt, pizza, and online book shopping. Teens received gift bags containing cool prizes such as squishy brains, pirate-themed rubber duckies, Frisbees, and earbuds from County of Los Angeles Public Library (CoLAPL) Teen Services. Kayla Kim, a new volunteer, exclaimed, "I loved it. It was fun and exciting!"

The IL class at the library covered resources related to upcoming school reports. The IL sessions also reviewed the best use of Google and .gov websites, as well as Biography Resource Center, Infotrac, and ProQuest. After the scavenger hunt, teens

used the YALSA Teen Tech Week Mini Grant monies to learn about collection development in a hands-on manner by spending \$350 on books for the YA collection from Amazon.com. Teens selected No Fear Shakespeare titles and box sets including the Shopaholic and Gossip Girl series.

Friday was a fun technology day, as teens had the opportunity to compete in Wii gaming, *Guitar Hero*, *Dance Dance Revolution*, and a variety of popular board games. Young Adult Board volunteers often have trouble setting up the gaming equipment, so a visiting librarian and gaming aficionado joined us to teach teens setup techniques and gaming tips. The remainder of the grant funding was dedicated to Friday's gift card drawing: every day that teens attended a TTW program, they received one entry in the drawing for gift cards from EB Games, Starbucks, Bath and Body Works, Jamba Juice, and Barnes and Noble. Josie Rojas, a middle school student who received extra credit for participating, said of TTW, "It's cool. Nice games. I learned lots of stuff."

The young adults who participated in TTW activities gained familiarity with modern technological tools; discovered top resources for middle school, high school, and college-level research; and learned that the library is a place to learn about technology skills.

The Friends of the La Puente Library provided funds for pizza, snacks, and drinks, as well as board games, craft supplies, disposable digital cameras, photo paper, and a Shutterfly.com photo book and photo prints for a promotional poster displayed after the event. The CoLAPL paid for the video game equipment as well as the employee and artist time. Participants created a thank you card for the grant sponsors, Dungeons & Dragons and YALSA. **YALS**

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Some of the books in the new gaming collection.

because it is the only thing that gets her son to socialize. In addition, because gaming is not always understood and supported by teachers at school, I see the positive effect that it has on these teens when they find adults respecting and encouraging their interest at the library. They always make a point of thanking me for the programs. While they all appreciate the tournaments and prizes, one teen's statement sums up how most of them feel. When asked what he liked best about our TTW tournament,



Division 1 of the *Super Smash Brothers Melee* tournament.

he replied, "the opportunity to hang out with friends and play games."

We are also trying to support and educate teens in other areas of technology. We held our first Teen Screen Film Festival in January. Teens submitted short films and were awarded prizes in four areas: best overall film, best editing, best screenplay, and best camerawork. We try to order technology-oriented books on everything from videoblogging to machinima. We had three teens conduct a How to Make a Movie for



From left to right: 2nd place winner Rachel Downey, age 12; 1st place winner Levi Fawcett, age 16; and 3rd place winner James Hoeffgen, age 16.

YouTube class for other interested teens at all four of our branches in fall 2007. Our next goal is to find funding to purchase our own Wii so we will not have to continue to borrow the system from our teens. Our thanks go to YALSA and their TTW 2008 sponsor, Dungeons & Dragons, for giving us this opportunity to connect teens with technology at the library. **YALS**

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Reference

1. U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts, City of La Puente. Data derived from Population Estimates, 2000 Census of Population and Housing, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, County Business Patterns, 1997 Economic Census, Minority-and Women-Owned Business, Building Permits, Consolidated Federal Funds Report, Census of Governments. Revised January 2, 2008. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0640340.html> (accessed May 18, 2008).

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