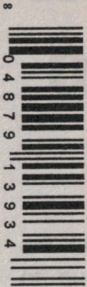


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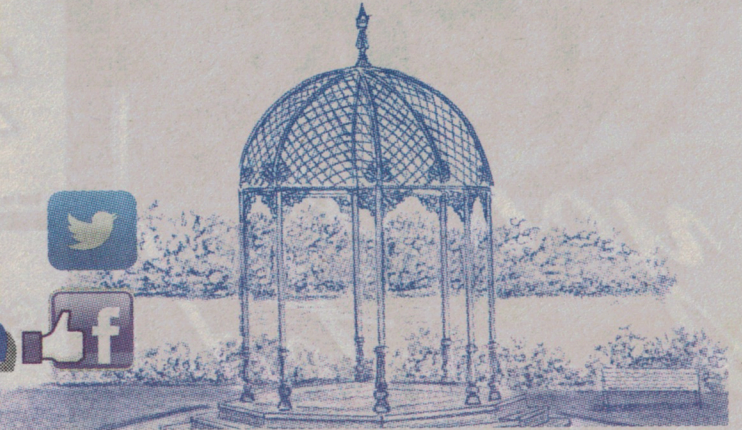
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SDM Foundation offers free computer lessons to everyone

By GAIL LOWE

MELROSE — All it takes is a little vision and a lot of money to make a big difference in the world.

Over the 94 years of his life, Scotland native Stuart D. McIntosh had that vision as well as the money needed to open the SDM Foundation, Inc., now located across from D'Amici's Artistry in Baking on Main Street in Melrose.

McIntosh traveled a winding but steady path that led him from earning a degree in chemistry at the University of Glasgow (Scotland) to early computing at Stanford University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology following the death of his parents. His early business focus was to make data more available to the actual business user.

And that's what SDM is all about. Upon his death in 2015, the Foundation, a non-profit 501(c)(3), was launched and has been up and running since Monday, July 11. The organization provides educational programs and services for non-technical people and gives them easier ac-



SDM FOUNDATION opened on Main Street on Monday, July 11 and is now offering free computer lessons to the public.
(Courtesy Photo)

cess to information through advanced technology such as the Internet.

In everyday language, this means SDM helps beginners use e-mail, Facebook, the Web, editing digital, online music and all of the other ways people interact, learn and participate in society through the use of technology.

MacBooks, iPads, Kindles, Chromebooks and Windows 10 are all at the site.

SDM Foundation makes using computers easy for everyone through the personal and patient help provided by professional trainers.

"We give small group lessons and one-on-one advice using either people's own computers or ours," said SDM Executive Director Kristin Thorp, who worked for McIntosh for 30 years.

Thorp added that whether people want to e-mail, connect with friends on Facebook and other social media or play games, assistance tailored to them.

"And Mr. McIntosh set it up in

his will that SDM's services are free," said Thorp.

"He was fond of saying that he did the same work all of his life. Only the tools changed over time."

While Mr. McIntosh never wrote an e-mail or looked up a Web site by himself, Thorp said he was a voracious reader and followed technology trends, medical advances and politics all his life.

"We have an endowment (from him) that funds our work," Thorp said.

So far, a variety of people have come into the shop. Some are older, some are new to Greater Boston or even the country and some are looking to increase their technology skills while looking for new jobs. Seating is available for about a dozen people throughout the shop if it's being used to full capacity.

"We take drop-ins and also make appointments for one-on-one help," said Thorp. People also bring in their own smartphones and an iPhone is used in the shop, but the list of technology equipment changes all the time.

"We ask people who come in what they want and sometimes we develop lessons based on requests," Thorp said.

Trainers have a variety of experience and are matched up with clients based on their needs.

"We have new employees starting in September. Ryan Bradford, one of our summer employees, is returning to Melrose High School when school opens," said Thorp, adding that most learners are beginners, so technology expertise is only one aspect of the job.

"The number one attribute in a trainer is patience," she said.

In the early months of SDM's opening, traffic was expected to be light, which would give the staff time to work out the kinks.

"It's why our ribbon cutting ceremony is in September. We're

already getting repeat visitors and lots of referrals," said Thorp.

The shop at 465 Main St. is open from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Visitors are allowed to stay as long as they want; however, food and beverages are not allowed inside.

One-on-one visits are set up for 30 or 60 minutes, and if the trainer is not busy, they can lessons can go beyond that timeframe.

Lessons are generally 30 minutes in length, and people are welcome to stay after lessons end to practice or ask additional questions.

"We will try to help people with any issue they have, and sometimes we point them to relevant online resources that they can use at home," Thorp said. "We are not equipped generally to handle hardware and virus issues, but we will help people find someone who can help them."

SDM's hours may expand in time and special evening or weekend classes may be offered in the future.

Some special classes in other locations may evolve, but this will depend on the needs of the community and our staff's abilities and interests.

SDM is a member of the Melrose Chamber of Commerce and works closely with the Council on Aging and Melrose Library, both of which refer people to the shop all the time.

"The City's 55+ Needs Assessment report clearly indicates a need for the kinds of services we focus on, and we are happy to be able to add to what the city can provide," said Thorp. "An open house on Thursday, Sept. 7 is planned from 12 noon to 3 p.m. so people can come in and see what we're all about."

For more information, visit www.sdmfoundation.net or call 781-606-2621.