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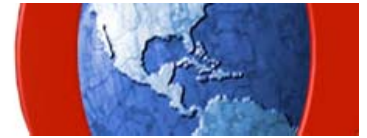
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WESTERN NEWS

Bluefields goes high tech

DALTON LAING, Observer correspondent
Saturday, April 05, 2003



BLUEFIELDS, Westmoreland -- This once simple fishing village has entered the technology age with the recent addition of a cyber centre and free classes for all the community's children who want to learn how to use the computer.

The cyber centre was set up under the guidance of Keith Wedderburn, chairman and coordinator of the Bluefields People Community Association's (BPCA) computer literacy programme.

According to Wedderburn, BPCA was established as a model for sustainable community development for the Caribbean, and he has included computer training as an integral part of the project.

In 1996, the Jamaica Sustainable Network Development Programme selected Bluefields as its sixth outpost for its information technology programmes, and computer classes were started that same year.

In keeping with BPCA's motto, "working together for a better future", a decision was made to place emphasis on computer literacy, particularly for children. It was against this background that computer classes were started, two months ago, for the three-to-six age group.

Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, students from the Bluefields Basic School spend hours learning the basics of computing.

"Bluefields will be the most computer literate region in Jamaica," said Wedderburn.

He has plans to add at least 20 more computers to the six currently in use and says BPCA is in contact with international donors and should realize its dreams soon.

"When we have more computers, we will be able to have individualized training where each child will have a computer for himself during classes," Wedderburn explained.

The training is free, but parents make contributions which go towards some of the overhead costs of running the centre. Classes will soon be expanded to accommodate other basic schools in the Bluefields Basin.

"Everyone deserves free access to computer education. If you can read, you can be computer literate," said Fabrice Menoyot, who developed the classes.

The classes were developed to provide opportunities for persons who want to

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become computer literate but cannot afford the usual high costs or for those who have had problems learning using traditional teaching techniques.

The ultimate aim of the BPCA programme is to have free computer classes within all schools and non-profit organizations in Jamaica within the next two years .

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