

Latvia@World Project Training Started in Rīga

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The Latvian Information and Communications Technology Association (LIKTA) has begun to offer free computer training to people in Rīga under the auspices of the Latvia@World project. On August 10, a new computer training class was ceremoniously opened. It has 10 workstations. The first instructors were certified on June 9 – 11. The plan is to train 30 instructors and then more than 1,000 residents of Rīga by the end of 2006.

In August, certificates were received by 117 residents of Rīga who had completed the free Latvia@World courses. Another 400 people were trained in September. The training is occurring with financial support from the Rīga City Council's E-Rīga project, as well as the Microsoft Unlimited Potential programme. The telecommunications company Lattelecom supported the installation of the training classroom. The project allows the people of Rīga to learn basic computer skills at no charge. Afterward, they can choose more in-depth studies on the basis of the aforementioned Microsoft programme.

In unveiling the new classroom, LIKTA president Imants Freibergs said that “the goal of this project is to help the people of Latvia to overcome digital and social gap and to speed up the emergence of the Information Society – something which is a prerequisite for the country's sustainable economic development. People must learn how to use information and to receive new knowledge.”

The director of Microsoft Latvia, Sandis Kolomenskis: “It is very important to help the people of Latvia to learn and to develop computer skills. Demand for the Information Society will be possible only if we teach people to work with computers and the Internet. Then people will understand the advantages which information technologies offer in their lives. Only one-third of Latvia's economically active residents use a computer at this time – in Estonia and in the new European Union member states when they are taken together, the indicator is, on average, two times higher.”

As has been reported in the past, each graduate of the course will receive an official certificate testifying to “basic Information Society skills”, a textbook, a list of free Internet access facilities in Rīga, a chance to open a free account at the Hansabanka bank, along with a connection to its Internet banking system, han-

za.net, as well as a free E-mail address in the www.latvijapasaule.lv portal.

A special one-hour class has been prepared for the people of Rīga. It is focused on the work of the www.riga.lv portal. Students learn how to find important information about the city, to learn about the services that are offered by local governments, to find and review elec-

tronic documents, to receive information about traffic restrictions and out-of-the-ordinary events, to post messages on the city's forum, and to review other useful information, too.

The director of the Rīga City Council's Information Technology Centre, Ēriks Zēgelis: “The lives of active residents of Rīga, as is the case with the work of the Rīga City Council, can no longer be imagined without modern technologies. Each year, greater numbers of local residents use the services that we have designed. This makes it easier for them to communicate with the City Council, and it allows people to save time and money. This training helps to break down the barrier which keeps people from using the advantages which are offered by information technologies. Educational projects are very much necessary, because the development of IT cannot be imagined without the education of potential users.”

The council chairman of Lattelecom, Gundars Strautmanis: “Research shows that a key problem with the provision of computer and Internet services in Latvia is that local residents lack motivation to use these things. If we teach people to



Microsoft Latvia director Sandis Kolomenskis presents a certificate to LIKTA president Imants Freibergs, thus confirming that the new training classroom is a Microsoft Unlimited Potential Centre



A training session at the Latvia@World classroom in Riga

work with computers, we gain potential E-service users who will understand and make use of the benefits that are offered by the Information Society. The more people gain these skills, the more quickly E-services will be put into place, and the more quickly the Information Society will develop.

THE OLDEST LATVIA@WORLD STUDENT

Augusts Muberts was born in 1915 and still works as a locksmith for a local company. The relative who phoned in to register Muberts for the training said that the elderly gentleman was bright, that he still drove his car, and that after the training he planned to sell the car to buy a PC.

Muberts, the oldest student to take the course, began training on September 11, and he received the certificate which attests to his basic Information Society skills on the very next day. Muberts also received a Hansabanka gift certificate worth LVL 250 to be used to purchase a PC. The gift certificate was presented by Ģirts Bērziņš, a member of the bank's board who directs its product development and IT management department.

Ģirts Bērziņš: "It is very commendable for a person of such an age to attend courses and learn new things. The main thing is probably to overcome initial fears about that which is not known. Hansabanka has always supported people who wish to

learn. We don't care how old these people are, the main thing is their desire to grow and to learn new things. That is why we are very pleased to see how many people are taking part in these programmes."

Along with Augusts Muberts, nine other people in Riga received their computer training certificates – six ladies and three gentlemen. Dzintars Gecs and Skaidrīte Krallīņa are both over 70, while three other members of the group were between 59 and 61 years old. Among them there were pensioners, as well as people who work in such fields as construction and the transport industry.

The Latvia@World project was launched by the LIKTA in 2004. The project is focused on local residents who have no experience with computer and Internet use or who have used a computer, but not the Internet. In 2005, training was offered in seven places in Latvia – Daugavpils, Jēkabpils, Krāslava, Ludza, Preiļi, Valmiera and Ventspils. About 7,000 people have been trained until today. For more information about the project, please visit www.latvijapasaule.lv. □



The oldest Latvia@World student so far has been Augusts Muberts (left), seen here receiving congratulations from LIKTA president Imants Freibergs and Hansabanka representative Ģirts Bērziņš. Bērziņš presented Muberts with a LVL 250 gift certificate to be used to purchase a personal computer