Five OSCR labs getting a tech refresh

There may be fewer students on campus during the summer, but the Office of Student Computing Resources (OSCR) has plenty to do. Five OSCR labs are getting updated with new computers for the fall semester: Engineering 318, McClelland Park, Shantz, the Multimedia Learning Lab, and the Multimedia Zone.

Karina McCune, UITS Operations and Client Services Lead for OSCR, says, “We have a lot of classes who have reserved labs for Summer I, and a lot of equipment delivered that needs to go into some of these labs. It’s keeping us busy.” The lab in the Shantz building was the first to be refreshed.

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Chris McCotter, working for Arizona’s forests

Tuesday, June 20, Chris McCotter was at work in Telecommunications Customer Service, when he received the phone call he’d been half-expecting. The Wallow Fire was continuing to spread and the eastern Arizona town of Springerville was being evacuated. Chris left immediately and drove the five-hour trek to the small town.

Chris’s best friend is a wildlife manager for Arizona Fish and Game, and was putting in 16-hour days on the blaze that was sweeping through his territory—leaving him no time to protect his own home. Another friend of Chris’s had a mule, Zack, who had been rescued after the fire swept went through Nutrioso. But now Zack needed to be evacuated from Springerville. MORE pg 4
Unique to this summer’s tech refresh is that all the new machines going into the labs will be Macintosh desktop computers featuring dual boot operating systems: Labs that formerly had Windows-based machines will still boot up standard in Windows on the Macs, but users who want to use the Macintosh operating system will be able to reboot into OS X if they wish. Labs that normally featured Mac OS X will now allow users to boot into Windows.

According to McCune, “We’re making more labs dual boot so that instructors looking for a computer lab classroom to reserve will have fewer constraints. They’ll have more options of locations to choose from. It’s also great for students using open-access labs if they have a preference for one platform or the other.”

She says other universities have gone to dual-boot labs and found that the only drawback has been a slightly longer log-in time. Otherwise they’ve been very successful.

Another change in OSCR labs this year is that AME s314 is going from an instruction-only multimedia classroom to an open-access general computing lab that will still be reservable. This lab is already configured as a dual-boot lab, so will be another location offering platform flexibility to drop-in users.

Use of OSCR labs is free to students, faculty, and staff. Hours and locations are available at oscr.arizona.edu.

Geeks Gather and Gab (G3)!

By a 14% margin, Geeks Gather and Gab won the vote held at the Staff Appreciation Party as the name for our monthly get-togethers.

The next staff social will be Friday, August 12, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. in CC 303, so put it on your calendar!

HPC computers arrive

Research Computing’s Data Center is still under construction, so the several tons of supercomputing and storage equipment delivered in June went into the computer room on the CC second floor for now.

Around the organization ...

UAConnect prepping to resume migrations

After collaborating on solutions with Microsoft, and revising and consolidating UAConnect web pages for enhanced usability, the UAConnect Project Team is preparing to resume migrations for campus staff still on the Horde email system, with a deadline of November 10 for opting in to migration.

Lori Shinn has been named the new Director of Exchange Email/Calendar Implementation. Her initial efforts will be focused on building external relationships and support for the project while providing leadership to the UAConnect Project Team.

Ryan Duitman has been chosen as the UAConnect Desktop Support Services Coordinator, overseeing a team of five contractors who will provide support to campus staff.

The Windows Server support team has been participating in Exchange server and PowerShell training in preparation for supporting any on-premises server needs for researchers with data-export restrictions.

Apple training for techs

Last week a trainer took selected staff from the 24/7 IT Support Center and WNC team through a curriculum to allow them to be certified by Apple as Macintosh desktop support providers. Another group of staff will take the training later this summer.

Shantz lab before, during, and after its tech refresh. Photos by Nick Lopez
Open Thread: Chris McCotter

“Zack’s as stubborn as they come,” Chris says. “I was afraid it’d take us a couple of hours to get him loaded, but he walked right into the trailer. He knew.” Chris soaked his friend’s property, moved their trail- ers and vehicles to the middle of the horse paddock, and then drove Zack to Pinetop where he ended his long day late that night.

“It was powerful,” Chris says, “standing on my friend’s porch and being able to see fire in three different directions. I’m from the Midwest, and it felt like when you see a tornado coming. It’s big, and there’s nothing you can do but get out of the way.”

Mule rescue isn’t Chris’s usual animal activism. He’s an avid outdoorsman, and his focus is mostly on wildlife and habitat conservation. “It started when my daughter was born,” he says. “Urban sprawl is eating up habitat at a rapid pace. I wanted to make sure my kids got to have the same opportunity to enjoy the outdoors and wildlife that I did.”

Chris visited a meeting of the Tucson Chapter of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and was so impressed he became a committee member. RMEF raises funds regularly with archery shoots, skeet shoots, and banquets. They then evaluate grant applications and determine where that money can best be put to use.

Projects they’ve funded include outdoor opportunities for children, wildlife watering for drought years, DNA testing on elk populations, thinning brush for fire protection, and buying land outright to protect it from development. They often team up with government agencies or other “critter” organizations. In addition to funds, local chapters turn out volunteers to put boots on the ground to pull up invasive weeds, maintain access roads, and clear brush.

“RMEF is one of the highest-ranking non-profit organizations as far as low overhead,” Chris says. “It’s mostly volunteer with very few administrative costs.” For a volunteer who likes to say, “I’m just a redneck hunter,” Chris is very involved with keeping the chapter running professionally.

Since Chris has joined the chapter, he’s proud to say during his term as Chapter Co-Chair, he helped raise attendance at the annual banquet from 400 to selling out at La Paloma with 800 people. Despite Tucson being abundant with desert lowlands rather than forest, the Tucson Chapter is consistently one of the most successful in the national organization. At the 2011 national Elk Camp, out of 550 chapters across the United States, the Tucson Chapter won first place in Fundraising Net, with nearly $360,000 raised, as well as winning first place in Total Chapter Activity.

Those funds will be put to good use. Already, in the wake of the Wallow Fire, Arizona chapters have committed $75,000 and were matched by the national organization for a total of $150,000. One project funded provides hay and feed for livestock so they won’t be competing with displaced wildlife for forage, and another is an initiative to re-seed native grasses.

Other projects to be funded will depend upon review of the burned areas. “I watched that fire go through elk summer feeding grounds down through their winter feeding grounds,” Chris says. “I just hope there’s rain. The wildlife can get through one lean season, but if the winter feeding grounds don’t come back this year, the wildlife will be in a world of hurt.”

On a personal level, it’s hard for him to see the damage. “That was some of the most beautiful country in Arizona. My wife just shot her first Arizona turkey last year out there, and I had to call her and say, ‘Remember where we went hunting? It’s completely gone.’”

Chris is back at his desk, now, making sure campus phone and network clients are getting the service they need. But evenings and weekends he’ll be working with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to help Arizona’s backcountry areas come back from the devastation.