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The early years of NJAET

This article was written with the assistance of the NJAET Executive Board members who remember the good ol' days!

The beginning – 1986-87

The formation of NJAET was based on needs identified in 1986. Technology implementation was making headway in schools throughout the state. However, many of the early adopters were isolated. A core group of educators from throughout New Jersey with key input from Ted Smorodin of the NJ Department of Education agreed that a state organization was needed to offer support and opportunities in educational technology. Why not let educators have a professional organization to share information, ideas, experiences and technology resources? After all, librarians, school nurses, and content area specialists had already established statewide organizations...

What was the state of technology support then? In 1986, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) had an Educational Technology Unit with a staff of five that included Ted Smorodin. Among the projects of the NJDOE Ed Tech Unit was managing three regional Educational Technology Training Centers (located in the Regional Curriculum Services Units at East Orange [North], Old Bridge [Central] and Sewell [South]), the Educational Technology Network (a dial-up network that supported e-mail and limited bulletin boards), and School Leaders in Educational Technology. Members of School Leaders were appointed by each county superintendent and included at least two representatives from every county in New Jersey.

Several members of the School Leaders suggested that a steering committee be formed to explore establishing a state organization for Ed Tech. And, so it began with early leaders/meeting moderators that included Dr. Ted Smorodin, NJDOE, Jack Jennings, ETTC – South and Dr. Jamie McKenzie, Superintendent of Montgomery Township School District.

The First Year of Exploring

During 1986-87 several meetings were held at a variety of locations to explore the potential, process, and all-important formalization of a state organization. Some of the early meetings were held in unique yet convenient locations. One that is remembered with fondness by the founding members is Bob's Big Boy located on the Garden State Parkway at the Cheesquake rest area (near exit 124 in South Amboy). Other public sites were the Forsgate Country Club in Jamesburg and Olga's Diner in Marlton. The homes of the steering committee members throughout New Jersey were enlisted as meeting sites as well.

All these meetings resulted in the formation of the constitution and bylaws, which were first adopted on June 5, 1987. This, then, might be considered the formal beginning of the New Jersey Association for Educational Technology.

The first meeting of the Executive Committee (or board) was hosted by Ted Smorodin on September 10, 1987 at the New Jersey Department of Education offices, Trenton. This board meeting was followed by the charter membership meeting on October 6, 1987 at the Sheraton, East Brunswick. FYI, the keynote at the first general membership meeting was delivered by Sandra Morris of the David Sarnoff Research Center on the role of the instructional designer in digital video interactive technology.

The Certificate of Incorporation

The NJAET Certificate of Incorporation as a not-for-profit [401(c)(3)] was developed in 1987-88 and officially executed on July 12, 1988. Following are the trustees (alphabetically), indicating the statewide nature of the organization and the incredible array of early technology pioneers involved in

establishing our organization.

Glenn Anderson, Ocean County

Sharon Chapin, Burlington County

Rebecca Gold, Mercer County

J. Evans (Jack) Jennings, Jr., Gloucester County

Judith Kohlback, Sussex County

Bill Lake, Camden County

Richard Langheim, Bergen County

Charles Lorber, Sussex County

Bill Moore, Morris County

Joyce Nussbaum, Middlesex County

Henry Peterson, co-founder of New Jersey Educational Computing Conference

Harry Selover, Sussex County

Ted Smorodin, New Jersey Department of Education

Richard Springer, Ocean County

The First Conference

On Saturday, October 15, 1988, the first NJAET Fall Conference took place held at (then) Glassboro State College (now Rowan University). The conference began with 16 individual workshops and presentations, including one by Ted. The day concluded with a futuristic keynote speaker, Dr. Fred Hofstetter, University of Delaware. As part of his address, Dr. Hofstetter demonstrated how optical disks provide quick access multimedia information—including videodisc and that “new” item, CD-ROM. (Do you think it will catch on?) As the attendees departed on that Saturday afternoon, it was agreed that the event was extremely valuable and that there should be an NJAET conference annually. (Editor’s note: This year will mark 20 years of NJAET Fall Conferences.)

Early Meetings

In the early years of the organization, general meetings were organized and held at various sites throughout the state. For example, on February 28, 1990, a meeting was held at the Madison Hotel, with 42 members engaged in small group discussion on the topic: “What can NJAET do to support teachers and administrations with their school programs.”

Other titles presented by Ted at early meetings include:

- ETN to NJLink – how to e-mail and communicate electronically in NJ (1987)
- Is an Apple Network in your (school’s) future? (1990)
- Telecommunications: Technologies for the rest of the decade (1991)
- LabQuest – a free software resource for math and science (1993)
- The Internet through NJLink – GREAT NEWS! (1994)

Electronic Communications--the Early Years

From the very beginning of NJAET in 1987, members could communicate electronically via the state maintained dialup network, Educational Technology Network, which evolved into NJLink. This network was a combined effort of the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), through Ted Smorodin and New Jersey Network (NJN) Public Television and Radio,

through Stephanie Harakal. Ted and Stephanie were truly industrious and committed to providing NJAET members and educators in the state with access to e-mail and bulletin boards.

Around 1988, the FrEdMail network provided additional support for broader interstate e-mail capability in our state. Ted Smorodin was a catalyst in arranging this service for New Jersey’s educators. He contacted Al Rogers, the key creator of the FrEdMail system, and worked with him to provide the access nodes needed to make the system work. [Editor’s note: FrEdMail evolved into the Global SchoolNet Foundation. See: <http://www.globalschoolnet.org/index.html> More about Al Rogers at: <http://www.gsn.org/about/founders.html#al>]

Today communicating via e-mail with others in an isolated area or crisis situation where mail and telephone access are limited is commonplace. However, in the 1980s, it was a unique and proud moment for NJLink when this happened. And as the FrEdMail network evolved, it became possible for New Jersey teachers and their classes to interact with classes in other states and then in other countries to explore their similarities and differences as they developed and carried out joint projects.

Training in accessing these services was offered by the three NJDOE regional Educational Technology Training Centers (ETTCs), located in the Regional Curriculum Services Unit that were in East Orange (Darlene Nowak), Old Bridge (Karen Warner), and Sewell (J. Evans Jennings, Jr.). Note that these original regional ETTCs were operated by the state from 1984 through 1990.

Further support was provided by Ted and Stephanie Harakal who offered workshops at the ETTCs and numerous other locations around the state. They were willing to go far and wide throughout our state to help educators understand the benefits of electronic communication. As a result of these workshops, new friendships were developed, the NJDOE and NJN gained new insights on the classroom from the teachers’ point of view, and teachers benefited immensely in gaining new knowledge and skills while learning about the many services provided by New Jersey Network and the department.

In 1994, Ted and Stephanie worked diligently with the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory’s Diane Carroll to establish Internet access through the lab’s portal. Their efforts and collaboration resulted in a text-based interface for full Internet access via an 800 number. Because of the efforts of Ted and Stephanie, NJAET members, along with educators throughout the state, could experience the advantages of linking to the World Wide Web.

NJAET has evolved over the years to more electronic forms of communications, but its mission remains the same... to provide information and training for teachers so that they can help our students learn better. Thanks to all those in the early years who laid the foundation for our continuing mission.