

Old Computer? Slow Computer? No Computer?

Tech Corps Wisconsin: Narrowing the Digital Divide

by Tom Kral

It's an all-to-common problem plaguing too many in the 21st century: no computer skills, out-dated hardware and software, no access to the World Wide Web....this is the computer age, right? Michael Pitsch saw the problem when he realized his daughter's elementary school was still using Apple Macintoshes for the 1980's!

Initially seeking to meet the elementary school's unspoken need, Pitsch opened a for-profit computer store and succeeded in [economically] upgrading the school's computers through refurbished donations. Pitsch's problem-solving approach appealed to other local area schools and soon demand exceeded supply. In order to encourage corporate hardware donations to meet the need, Pitsch sought to become a non-profit organization. Thus began TCW (Tech Corps Wisconsin), a non-profit organization providing computers, training and technical support to schools, non-profit groups and qualifying households. TCW also provides affordable computer solutions to the general public.

Located at the corner of 21st and Lathrop Avenue in Racine, volunteer-run TCW may appear a commercial storefront, but Pitsch insists it's so much more. While TCW does supply its customers with an array of products and services, they want to remind the public: all TCW purchases are tax-deductible and represent a donation to the organization. When you buy from TCW, you are directly supporting the organization in its effort to improve and edify the technological status of the community and its citizens.

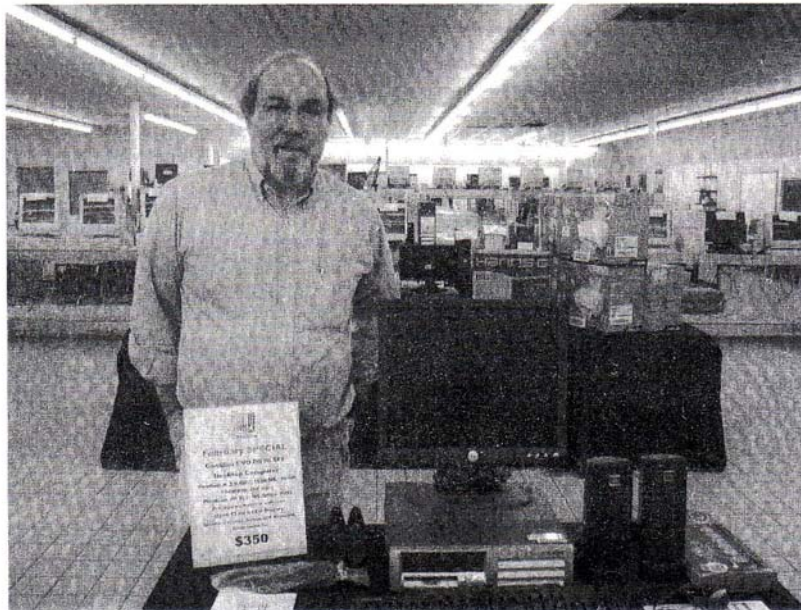
So what does TCW have to offer the consumer in need? Refurbished corporate-grade computers. *"They are much tougher than consumer grade electronics"*, say Pitsch, *"They're built to run, non-stop, for years. You can buy them for as little as a few hundred dollars. They come loaded with useful software, a 1-yr parts & labor warranty, all the accessories, an operating manual and local technical support. Most new computers are less expensive today [as compared to yesterday]... but they're no longer bundled with the software that makes them useable. You'll have to pay extra for that plus accessories."* Also available from TCW are group/individual

training sessions, data center operations and IT management [for schools and non-profit organizations], low-cost internet services and computer repair and recycling services.

Though at times Pitsch has found his work "emotionally lucrative", he loves it all the same.

"This is one tough way to make a living, because it is constant change. You have to be passionate about it, driven by curiosity. I guess I am." Pitsch, 56, expects to run TCW for another 10 years. In those years, he's hoping to increase his staff base and prepare a successor to take over and possibly expand TCW and its efforts.

Although Michael Pitsch seeks to meet needs and fulfill requests, Pitsch makes known his own heart's desire: *"If I had one wish it would be that someone would buy this building and donate it right back to us."* Even in his dreams, he still seeks to encourage positive change in the community. Thank you for your efforts, Michael. The Racine Mirror salutes you.



For more information about Tech Corps of Wisconsin, Inc. or to make a donation, please contact Mike Pitsch at (262)-619-0931 or visit www.tcw.org.