

Hand-held computers a hit with students

BY SUE BUCK
STAFF WRITER

Melissa McDermid and her second grade class at Kenbrook Elementary in Farmington Hills learned graffiti recently, and it was a good thing.

McDermid's class tried out a set of 25 hand-held computers, often referred to as Palms, a trademarked name.

The letters or symbols displayed on the screen are called graffiti.

In addition to the information onto the tiny computer, kids were able to send messages back and forth - a practice their teacher enjoyed as well.

"The kids learned how to beam each other," McDermid said. "I beamed a math program to five kids and addition



With a lot of concentration, Gabrielle Barge figures out how to use the hand-held computer.

and subtraction facts."

The hand-held devices, which are like those used by many parents, will be rotated throughout the district.

McDermid told each student to consider each computer a "200 egg."

That meant they cost money and were fragile, McDermid said. She didn't want them to be forgotten, though small in size, the hand-helds are computers.

They were purchased at a greatly reduced cost of about \$100 each, said Bill Nedela, a district technology trainer and science consultant.

"We bought them in bulk," Nedela said.

The computers allow students to beam test results to the teacher, he said.

McDermid, her student assistant Christie Snell, and the students finished a two-week trial period Jan. 23. Highmeadow Common Campus students will use them next, Nedela said.

They were used previously in staff development, he said.

"We signed up through the media technician," McDermid said.

Everyone took an introductory lesson and sensitized their styles "pens" to get the right touch, which allowed them to write without using paper.

"They have been super excited," McDermid said. Children learn to use the hand-helds quicker because they aren't afraid of them like adults," Nedela said. "They've grown up with computers. They just know it."

There's 15,000 programs written for hand-helds, he said.

About eight to 10 district teachers have explored ways to use hand-held computers regularly in the district including through the technology budget.

The district allows for a matching building technology grant. Some grants, such as one expected to put the computers into the hands of every Berrien County seventh-grader, aren't available to the Farmington district because it's considered too affluent, Nedela said.

Nedela will train staff Feb. 10 at the Farmington Training Center and will give a presentation at Plymouth Salem High School Feb. 27.

stuck@oe.homecomm.net | (248) 477-5450



Erik Sucher glances over at Mikaelin Yaldo shoulder as they try to work the hand-held computers.

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Barnett chairs NLC tech committee

Farmington Hills councilwoman Vicki Barnett has been named chairwoman of the National League of Cities Steering Committee on Information, Technology and Communications.

Barnett will be responsible for guiding the committee as it

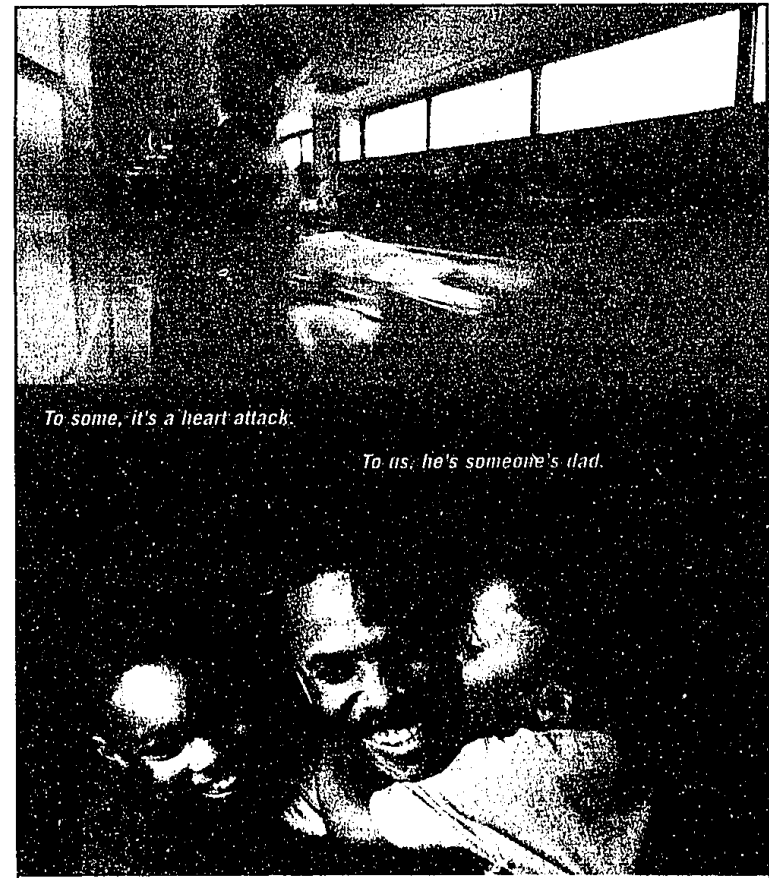
shapes the League's policy on proposed federal legislation regarding the nation's communities and information services.

Barnett has served on the ITC Committee since it started and was vice chairwoman last year. She said the primary purpose

of the committee is to balance the needs of cities with the needs of industry - to encourage technological innovation and the implementation of new services while protecting the health, safety and welfare of communities.

Several areas of concern this

year are continued federal funding for technology grants to public schools and libraries and preserving state and local authority to regulate and manage public rights-of-way as well as collecting fair compensation for private use of municipal property.



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