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PRESS RELEASE

Middle School Computer Club Repurposes Computers at Record Pace for Students in Need Club Helps Environment, Closes Digital Divide, Teaches Valuable Technical Skills and Community Service

Savage, Minn. - September 1, 2020. The Aspen Academy middle school computer club, the Penguin Corps, finds its true calling during the pandemic. The club teaches students in grades 5 - 8 how to repurpose old computers with a Linux-based Operating System and free open source software giving new life to old computers.

With being mandated to switch learning models from fully open to the distance/hybrid learning model one week before school opening, Aspen Academy saw a large and urgent need by its students for home computer devices. Faced with a limited budget and a backlogged computer supply chain, Aspen turned to its middle school Linux computer club, the Penguin Corps.

Students in the Penguin Corps learn to install and use the Linux operating system and free, open source software to repurpose old computers ready to be thrown away. Before the pandemic, they had already made a community service project of refurbishing the used computers for students in need. When the pandemic hit in the spring, they transformed their project into a mission to collect donated computers, recycle them with Linux and free open source software, and give one to every Aspen student that needed one. This fall, with the quick switch to the hybrid model right before the school year started, the club needed to fulfill over 220 requests from families in a matter of days.

The week before school started, the club worked at record speed repurposing over 150 computers. "I love having the students help become partners in the solution. They learn to give back to the community while developing great computer skills at a young age." Commented Stu Keroff, middle school teacher and leader of the Penguin Corps. "However, there is still a need for computers. We don't have enough for families in our community who need them."

Aspen has received donations this year from Caribou Coffee, St. Vincent De Paul Twin Cities, Search Leaders LLC, SEH Inc., and many area individuals. Aspen is still in need of more devices to repurpose. Please consider helping close the digital divide in our community by donating old laptops or desktops to the Aspen Penguin Corps.

About the Penguin Corps

The Penguin Corps is comprised of 5-8th grade students and is one of only two youth Linux clubs in the state of Minnesota. Last school year, the club repurposed over 60 computers to give to the community. As leaders in their field, students presented at the Minnesota School Board Association Leadership Conference, DrupalCon Global Conference, the Minnesota Department of Education Webinar, “Strategies for Acquiring and Effectively Using Technology,” the Sourcewell Impact Education Conference, and was interviewed by Brian Lunduke, Deputy Editor of the Linux Journal.

About Aspen Academy

Aspen Academy, a 2019 National Blue Ribbon School, is a tuition-free, public charter school located in Savage, Minnesota. Aspen Academy is open to all families in Savage, Prior Lake, Shakopee, Burnsville and the surrounding communities and provides an academic program focused on the Core Knowledge curriculum for kindergarten, primary school (grades 1-4) and middle school (grades 5-8). Aspen Academy’s mission is to provide scholars with a well-rounded, education which meets the intellectual, creative, and social needs of each child. Aspen’s goal is to prepare scholars for future educational opportunities and life in a global society by creating an academically rigorous, literature-rich environment where class sizes are small, and a strong sense of community is built and valued.

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