

SENIOR COMPUTER USERS OF GREATER KANSAS CITY

HISTORY BY Teresa Weaver

These narratives were written by Dr. John Hunkeler, Harold Duvall with updates by

Teresa Weaver (2013) and Bob Bowser (2026)

Dr. John D. Hunkeler

EDUCATION: A Lifelong Pursuit of Excellence

In the winter of 1990, I attended an international meeting of ophthalmologists. At that meeting I learned about an educational program called SeniorNet. The program offered an opportunity for seniors to become involved in personal computers, lifelong learning and growth. I was so impressed by the service the program provided to seniors that I brought the idea back to Kansas City and the Hunkeler Eye Clinic. At the Hunkeler Eye Clinic we understand that seniors are active and have a desire for continued quality of life. This made the project a natural for us.

To make the program truly a community effort I brought the idea to Sprint executives. The combination of learning, communications, information networks and computers seemed like a natural for cosponsor - ship. They agreed. Our next step was to find a good computer lab for the program. We wanted a place that offered a good location, professional teaching and the greatest access to computer technology. Johnson County Community College offered these assets.

The program took a great deal of coordination between Janis Wall, RN, MPA of Hunkeler Eye Clinic, Cathy Peterson, Community Affairs Director of JCCC, and Marcia Kenley of Sprint. They succeeded, and the program began with the fall semester of 1990. Today over nine hundred students have taken SeniorNet classes at JCCC. The fall of 1993 is a landmark semester. Through the work of the area coordinator, we had the highest enrollment of any semester.

Many of the SeniorNet members have come to Hunkeler Eye Clinic for eye care. They never fail to let us know how highly they think of the program and the instructors. The program is a success because it meets the needs of the students just as we try to meet the needs of our patients. The Hunkeler Eye Clinic is proud to be a co-founder of this successful program for lifelong learning.

As JCCC Sees It

We are pleased to have become an official SeniorNet learning site. SeniorNet is a nonprofit organization based at the University of California, San Francisco, providing support services to senior adults using computers throughout the United States, Canada and the international community.

Course offerings have expanded since 1990 to include introductory classes for both IBM and Macintosh computers, as well as courses in word processing, spread sheets, telecommunications, ancestral computing, Quicken, Windows and other software packages.

In May 1993 Johnson County Community College received the Aging Advocacy Award at the Kansas Governor's Conference on Aging in Lawrence, Kansas. This award is presented to organizations that actively demonstrate a concern for the well-being and quality of life of older Kansans.

On a Roll in the Midwest

by *Harold M. Duvall* – (No longer affiliated with us. Moved out of state).

When I first started with SeniorNet there were only nine members of the infant group. Hunkeler Eye Clinic and Sprint had recently contributed the financial

wherewithal to make it an active group. We had only recently begun classes at Johnson County Community College. At one of the first meetings, I foolishly made the comment that what was needed was someone to organize a local group and promote it in the community. Kathy Peterson quickly responded with "Why don't you be that person?" and we will provide the meeting space. I gingerly accepted little knowing what it would involve.

We now have many courses at Johnson County Community College as well as at the Area Vocational and Technical School in Wyandotte County. Kathy Peterson and Kim Brown have been the moving powers behind these additions. We are hoping to create an auxiliary site for classes on the Missouri side of the state line.

There are now five new Pentel computers in the JCCC flex lab. These were donated to SeniorNet by the Intel Company for the use of members. On several afternoons each week, SeniorNet volunteers will be available for individual tutoring. It is not necessary to be taking a course at JCCC. Being a SeniorNet member and being eager to learn are the only requirements. Of course, anyone taking a class is more than welcome to come for extra tutoring as well.

In the last five years the membership has grown to over three hundred - fifty hearty souls who want to stay abreast of the technological advances represented by computers and telecommunications. We have a volunteer calling committee, regularly poll members about the direction we should go and to help each other solve computer problems. Through the volunteer efforts of our members we have a monthly newsletter, the SeniorNetter by name. Now we have established a SeniorNet web site as you can see and are looking for a sponsor for it. We are instructed and were assisted in creating this Web page by [Webcrafters Computing](#).

In the course of providing speakers for our monthly meetings, I have met a number of young businessmen around the Metro Area who have not only shared their expertise with our members but have graciously offered discounts to members.

This represents savings on the purchase of computer hardware and software as well as on services, repair and even Internet access.

Each Spring Sprint has a gala graduation ceremony for those who have completed classes at JCCC and AVTS and we end the year with a Christmas celebration in the Hunkeler Eye Clinic. All work and no play make Jack and Jill dull, but that's not the story with SeniorNetters. We do try to enjoy life to the fullest.

With the help of all these folks we are growing by leaps and bounds. Thanks to you.

In 1990, when the Overland Park Learning Center was formed under the sponsorship of Hunkler Eye Center, Kansas City, Missouri, Sprint and the Johnson County (KS) Community College there were only nine members of the infant group and classes had just started for seniors at Johnson County Community College. Our membership has progressively grown until we now have at any one time over 400. Membership comes from the Metropolitan area which includes Kansas City, Missouri, Kansas City, Kansas, Johnson County, Kansas and includes several who are from out state Missouri and Kansas, e.g., Odessa, Missouri, Lansing and Paola Kansas which represents a fifty-mile radius. A newsletter was begun in 1994 by Marcie Vogel and Teresa Weaver.

Initially we started addressing the needs of seniors who were interested in the information age by having monthly meetings with programs. Realizing that the formal class setting offered by Johnson County Community College were placing too many stresses on our members, we started, in 1997, to offer tutoring and workshops to them, taught by peers.

Still on a roll...Teresa Weaver

In May of 1998 the steering committee (now known as the Coordinating Council) was formed after receiving a letter from a member questioning, "Why could we not be more responsive to members social needs". The area coordinator Harold M. Duvall scheduled our first meeting on May 5th to address this question. The consensus was that our group was a computer user group not social. Our mission is to serve the technical needs of the membership and to respond to member expectations. Initially goals were set to explore; Social/Interaction and Computer needs, Funding and an off-campus site. At a subsequent meeting, we further defined our Purpose; "To meet the computer needs, individual and group of SeniorNetters". Membership of the first committee consisted of 15 and monthly meetings would be held on the first Monday prior to the regular program meeting. The Chairperson was Teresa A. Weaver.

During our first year, considerable progress was made to address our goal.

Results were:

1. **TASK FORCE FORMED** - To explore establishing a partnership with **KCPT** so that we could use their computer lab for classes. **Contract executed in Dec 1999.**
2. **GRANT**- Proposal written to fund equipment. Unsuccessful
3. **SURVEY** - of the membership was conducted reference perceived needs. Accomplished.
4. **SNUGGLES** - A social group was started to meet monthly at a local restaurant, the purpose is to share computer experiences/ and projects and to meet social needs.
DISK- (discuss ideas share knowledge) started in Nov 1998.
5. **WEB** - Page was designed and implemented by our member Marcie Vogel.

These accomplishments completed the calendar year of 1998 and represented an impressive beginning for the newly formed steering committee.

Calendar year of 1999.

Accomplishments:

Archivist appointed and policy written as to just what will be retained.

Evaluation coordinator appointed for monthly meetings and comprehensive report presented at the Steering Committees monthly meeting. This helped us formulate plans for future meetings.

A proposal was written to assist in soliciting funds.

A presentation was aired on Channel 4. Harold M. Duvall featured.

Library for computer books was established, using a member's home.

Library for software established using a member's home.

Volunteer instructors were recruited.

Treasure for education funds established.

Formal Committees established; Program, Public Relations, Policy, Education, Small Groups, Finances, Social, Evaluation, and WEB page.

A satellite at Lawrence Kansas was started.

Calendar Year 2000.

Accomplishments:

Individual Tutoring started

Position of Membership was created

Senior to Senior project was started and will be a standard item in the newsletter.

Calendar Year 2001.

Task force formed to write By-Laws

By-laws submitted and after a few changes approved and local name changed to Senior Computer Users Group of Greater Kansas City. The Umbrella organization is still Senior Net.

Steering committee named changed to coordinating council and committee chairs name changed to coordinators.

Umbrella Job Descriptions written for Coordinators to use as a guide in formulating a working job description for their committee.

From 2001 to Feb 2009, the senior computer user group or more familiarly known as SenCom became its own entity when on November 26, 2003 we became a 501(c)(3) not for profit. We severed our relationship with Senior Net in December 2004. Our membership has leveled out to over 200. Our structure is now President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary and 10 Directors. We are essentially utilizing the job descriptions developed in 2001, but are in the process of updating. We updated our by-laws to reflect all the new changes.

Our education component has grown with our partnership with the 50Plus program of the Johnson County, KS Parks and Recreation. We now have a classroom at their Olathe center. An arrangement was made that we would receive a part of the class fee, this, and membership dues has made it possible to not only maintain and upgrade our equipment as needed but to purchase paper and stamps and door prizes.

Our classes have expanded to include offerings across the computer spectrum specifically tailored to seniors and at their pace. Because of our volunteer instructors, we are able to offer these classes throughout the year with the exception of July and August. The classes are advertised in the 50 Plus catalogue. Additionally, a notice of what we offer is now included in the monthly Best Times, a publication of the Johnson County, KS Area Agency on Aging. It is through this medium that our classes are filled and new members have been recruited.

In July of 2011 we were advised that we would have to move our workshops as the City of Olathe decided to close down the school where the 50 Plus program and SenCom were housed, this necessitated our putting all equipment in a rental. until a new site could be located. 50 Plus was unable to find a suitable site for us

In December 2011 we formed a partnership with the Shawnee Kansas Parks and Recreation Dept and started classes in 2012 at 6535 Quivera in the former police station.

In addition to the advertising in Best Times we now have workshops advertised in the Shawnee Parks and Recreation catalogue that is mailed out to residents as well as listings on their website. Our website (www.kcsenior.net) reflects who we are and what we offer to our current group of 209 members and the community at large.

Other activities that are geared for the general membership are our monthly meetings at Johnson County Resource Library, where we have informative computer related programs, preceded by a Q and A session and ending with door prizes.

A popular meeting is held monthly at a local restaurant and is followed by a Q and A session. We now have significant interest groups and they are: Genealogy, Senior Techies and iPad. Through these venues, members and guests have the opportunity to share computer knowledge and form friendships.

Still rolling...Bob Bowser

In 2014, we needed to find a new venue for SenCom's Annual Meeting since we were no longer meeting at Johnson County Community College. We ended up partnering with Lakeview Village, a local retirement community, to allow us to meet in one of their dining rooms and to have them cater the luncheon for the Annual Meeting. In the same year, SenCom applied to Google Fiber for a grant from the Kansas City Digital Inclusion Fund to upgrade our equipment. Unfortunately, we did not win an award, but decided to reapply in the future.

New computers were purchased in 2014 that ran the new Windows 8 operating system so that we could offer classes in the new operating system. Due to financial concerns, we made a small increase in the dues formula starting in October. We also began emphasizing our 501(c)3 status to members and encouraging them to consider donations to SenCom. Our website added a blog by Technical Director Joe Callison called Geek Free to distribute information to members. We had 214 members as of May 1, 2014.

During 2015, the Central Resources Library was remodeled requiring SenCom to find a new location or locations for its general meetings. Some of the locations that SenCom used included the Shawnee Community Center, Atonement Lutheran Church, and Mazuma Credit Union. We did receive a \$5,000 grant from Google Fiber in 2015 allowing us to update our computer lab in the Shawnee fire station and cover some expenses. SenCom purchased 4 new Windows 10 computers, a widescreen projector, and a new router. Unfortunately, SenCom's Genealogy Special Interest Group (SIG) went inactive in 2015 for lack of a leader. There were 202 members as of May 1, 2025.

In 2016, SenCom changed the name of its monthly social luncheon meeting from "SNUGGLES" (Senior Network Users Group Gathering, Learning, Experiencing, Sharing) to "Lunch & Learn" and moved to Pegah's restaurant on Johnson Drive. We were able to move our monthly general meetings back into Central Resources Library beginning in February 2016. We added an Android SIG meeting monthly and began meeting monthly for the iPad SIG. SenCom had 195 members as of May 1, 2016.

Our Lunch & Learn meeting were moved from Pegah's Johnson Drive location to their 87th Street location in 2017. We also purchased a mobile sound system to use at various meetings. Our membership was 176 as of May 1, 2017.

2018 saw one of SenCom's early leaders, Teresa Weaver, move from the Kansas City area to be nearer to her family. During her participation with SenCom

she had served as President, Membership Director, and iPad SIG leader. The computer lab was updated with new tables, changed ISP (internet services provider) to Google Fiber, and replaced some 6-year-old computers that ran Windows 7. We then made a charitable donation of the Windows 7 computers that we were no longer using for classes. SenCom had 184 members on May 1, 2018.

In honor of Teresa Weaver, SenCom named our computer lab the Teresa Weaver Computer Lab in 2019. Also in 2019, SenCom joined the Association of PC User's Groups (APCUG) to provide additional resources and be registered in the international group. In our first year of membership, SenCom won the APCUG Website competition, partially due to the amount of information shared with our membership. There were 149 members as of May 1, 2019.

Early in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic affected SenCom. Due to various restrictions designed to reduce the spread of COVID-19, SenCom no longer held physical meetings or taught classes. The board chose to put together virtual meetings to continue to support its membership. SenCom did monthly general meetings, Special Interest Group (SIG) meetings, board meetings, and committee meetings over the internet. Lunch & Learn meetings were cancelled while physical meetings could not be held.

During the pandemic, SenCom extended membership renewal dates since it could not fulfill its responsibilities to its members with in-person classes and SenCom's cost during that time were minimal. The Teresa Weaver Computer Lab was closed for the pandemic and SenCom's instructors taught members virtually using both hour and one and a half hour webinars, shorter versions of old and new classes. Membership in APCUG became very valuable as APCUG's Speakers Bureau provided many of our general meeting speakers. There were 193 members as of May 1, 2020.

SenCom continued to have virtual meeting through mid-2021. It began conducting hybrid (both in-person and on-line) meetings in 2021, including general meetings and SIG meetings. The Teresa Weaver Computer Lab was opened for in-person classes in April 2021, with procedures to protect the health of anyone that took classes from SenCom. Membership increased to 198 as of May 1, 2021.

By the start of 2022, normal meetings and classes were being conducted and SenCom's membership renewals began again. For a member with 7 months left on their membership as of March 2020, they would have at least 7 months before they would receive a notice of membership renewal.

Late in 2021, Shawnee had given SenCom notice that the building housing the Teresa Weaver Computer Lab would be undergoing renovation during 2022. Early in 2022 SenCom was notified that renovation was starting the first week of October 2022, and when completed, it would not be available to us for our computers and classroom. The board searched for alternative locations to house our equipment and teach classes in, but were not successful in finding a new location. Shawnee offered the use of their Civic Centre for classes and donated the use of excess computers that could be stored at the Civic Centre to replace our desktop computers that were in storage. In three days in early September, SenCom volunteers sorted, packed, and stored our equipment from the Teresa Weaver Computer Lab into a storage pod. Although the board continued to search for a new permanent home for our computer lab during 2022 and 2023, the search was unsuccessful. There were 225 members as of May 1, 2022.

In February 2023, SenCom's board evaluated its financial position and with a strong financial situation voted to reduce SenCom's dues. Donations continue to account for enough income to offset the reduction in dues. General meetings continued to be hybrid, in-person and on-line; while two of the three SIGs chose to be in-person only. During 2023 the board decided that the search for a new computer lab location was not being fruitful and storage fees for the equipment continued. The

storage pod was emptied and the equipment was offered for sale with members receiving the first opportunity to purchase items.

As time passed from the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the members that were retained while dues were paused chose not to renew when renewal times came. This was not unexpected since we had suspected that would be the case. By May 1, 2023, SenCom had 173 members.

Early in 2024, six new laptop computers and a charging rack were purchased making the equipment more mobile and with Windows 11, more reliable. The board determined that the interest earned from our checking account did not accurately reward SenCom for its financial management and chose to take advantage of higher CD rates and invested in over-lapping CDs. The teaching staff taught several classes for Merriam Parks and Recreation at the Merriam Community Center in addition to regular classes at Shawnee Civic Centre. The unused equipment from the Teresa Weaver Computer Lab continued to be sold through 2024 and two more laptops with AI capability and security keys for the eight laptops were added to SenCom's inventory. SenCom had 185 members on May 1, 2024.

Early in 2025 the remaining equipment from the Teresa Weaver Computer Lab was donated to the Shawnee Indian Mission State Historic Site in Fairway, Kansas to use in their educational setting. Classes were taught in conjunction with Tallgrass Creek Senior Living Community as an outreach program. The membership was at 166 members on May 1, 2025.