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Students

KIDS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Kids in Grand Rapids report on new and exciting happenings in their classrooms.

Cyber-Pals

Have you ever had a pen pal? How about a Cyber Pal?

What are "Tom and Jerry" up to now and what do they have to do with pen pals?

The "Tom and Jerry " you and I know are a crazy pair. A cartoon cat and mouse chasing each other. Well, here's a different kind of cat and mouse game. A Web chase full of conversation.

A cool organization in Grand Rapids, Michigan has linked disadvantaged kids with secret pen pals on the Web. This organization is called Philanthrotech. The secret pen pals are called "Cyber Pals." This is the way it works: Inner-city kids connect with Cyber Pals who live in a local retirement village. After "speaking "through e-mail for two months using cartoon character names like "Tom" and "Jerry", the students and their Cyber Pals finally met each other at a party in their honor. ;)



Check out what **Crystal Nowak**, a high-school student whose Cyber Pal was 78-year-old **Mary Tidwell**, told us about how she felt:

Lightspan: Did participating in this program help you make any special discoveries about yourself and the world around you?



Crystal: I had never really watched the news before I participated in the Cyber Pals Program. Now I watch it every day. I also found out that I could write. I had never really thought anything about the papers that I handed in for school. I never really thought that I could improve them or make them sound more interesting. After the program, I found out that I could improve my writing and improve my knowledge of the world. ;)

Lightspan: Did it make you more interested in writing? If so, what kinds of things do you like to write about?

Crystal: Yes, the program did make me more interested in writing. My favorite thing to write about is fictional things that could happen. For example, I just wrote a paper on the year I spent with Joan of Arc -- it was a "Time Exchange Program" (kinda like a foreign student exchange program only you exchange with people from different time periods). I also like to write about things that happened in history. I love doing the research and being able to portray the person or event that I am doing in any way I would like.

Lightspan: What advice would you give to other students about working with their community?

Crystal: Work with your community as much as possible. It can be fun as well as rewarding. Colleges and employers like to see a person who helps out in their community and cares about others. You could join a youth group, help out at a shelter, or even volunteer at a local park. Everything that you do counts, no matter how big or small it may be. Just knowing that you helped also makes you feel good about yourself.

But this isn't the only cool project that Philanthrotech is doing. They are also building robots with the help of Star Wars creator George Lucas. Huh?

Have you ever wanted to make your own robot droid, who could compete in challenging missions against other droids, just like in Star Wars?

Well, that's exactly what kids at three schools in Grand Rapids are doing this fall. And they're learning about the laws of nature at the same time. Each member of the winning team will even receive a new personal computer! Stay tuned to [Philanthrotech's Web site](#) for updates. :)

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