

2007-05-11 around the region Tim Preston

Floyd schools get new computers

05/11/2007 - HI HAT — From manual typewriters to laptop computers, Floyd County School Superintendent Paul Fanning remarked about the staggering advances in technology last week during a ceremony to recognize the addition of more than 500 new computers for the county's schools.

"I remember my dad typing single finger style on a manual typewriter — I thought that was pretty good stuff," Fanning said with a chuckle, adding, "Years later, the pinnacle of technology was the IBM Selectric. It had the most gracious mechanism. It was called Correctape."

Fanning said the first computer he purchased for professional use was an Apple, adding, "I have come full circle."

State Rep. Rocky Adkins said, "This is a big day in a lot of ways." Adkins said Floyd County officials were able to leverage coal severance money to get "two computers for the price of one," and help cancer researchers analyze data to develop cancer fighter drugs.

"That is exciting to me as a cancer survivor, to be on the cutting edge of research," Adkins said, asking the audience members to raise a hand if they or someone they know had been affected by cancer. Looking around the room he concluded, "Every hand is up. That's the reason this is so important."

The state representative further stated the new computers, presented through Kentucky DataSeam Initiative, provide "cutting edge" resources for students in the most rural locations.

"Blaine Elementary, for example, is one of the most rural schools in Lawrence County. For them to be able to teach pre-engineering there is exciting to me," he said.

Dr. John Trent, one of the cancer research scientists working at the University of Louisville as part of the collaborative effort between the state, university and schools in counties across the state, showed slides of images taken from a patient with kidney cancer, grabbing his hand at the wrist to illustrate the size of the patient's tumor.

That patient, he said, received a single dose of an experimental drug developed by the Kentucky research effort and remains cancer free three years later. He showed another image from a patient dealing with lung cancer. After two doses of a newly developed drug, a six-centimeter tumor in one lung has gone away, and the tumor in the other lung is shrinking, he explained.

"And," he said, "These drugs have no side effects at all."

The new computers for Floyd County, which are part of the largest grid system of its type in the world, will have an immediate impact on the researchers' ability to test new compounds, Dr. Trent said.

"The research we do on your computers is really simple. We use small models and let the computers see how they fit," he explained. "We have millions and millions of these molecules we want to test."

With the help of the computer grid, Trent said 14 new cancer-targeting compounds have already been identified.

"Kentucky is on top of a lot of great lists and Kentucky is on top of a lot of bad lists. This area has a 220 percent higher cancer rate and all of Eastern Kentucky is included in that," he said.

With the new computers in Floyd and other counties, Trent said research speed has been tremendous.

"As of April we're getting the equal of 152 CPU years per month," he said. "With Floyd County coming on that should double. We will soon be able to get 360 years worth of computer research in one month."

State Sen. Johnny Ray Turner spoke briefly during the ceremony at South Floyd High School.

"I am also a cancer survivor. I got lucky," Turner said. "I'm proud to be a part of this."

Brian Gupton, executive director of Kentucky DataSeam Initiative, showed his father's lunch bucket, and his own laptop computer, to demonstrate the differences between the working tools of two generations. The collaborative effort to provide local schools with new computers which aid in cancer research has already been subject to considerable outside sources, he said.

"The United Nations wants to know how we're doing this in Eastern Kentucky and we'll show them how," Gupton said, commending the Floyd County school staff for having 400 of their new computers up and running within 10 days of arrival.

Before adjourning, Adkins noted the staff and administration at Morehead State University are also doing their part to help the effort, providing professional development for educators to make use of the new technology.