

**HELP  
WANTED**

# Academy Works

Skills and technologies to level the workforce playing field.

## We need you to endow a chair at The Academy

From now until the end of June, we are undertaking a campaign to replace every chair at The Academy. That's 70 chairs in less than twelve weeks.

Because the need is clear, the campaign is straightforward. Students, guests, business partners, workshop attendees, and staff need a place to sit when they learn, work, interview, and inspire. While we continue to add new hardware, software, and assistive technology, we still have a strong need for this basic learning tool.

We also feel that this is a practical way to show support for the program by gifting a \$200 chair (which will include a replacement piston and replacement wheels) that can serve the learning needs of our students for the next 7 years (the average lifespan of our chairs). You will learn more about this over the next few weeks as we send our teams out to secure Endowed Chairs.

Emily Coder, Academy Instructor and Outreach Coordinator states:

"This is a practical and tangible way to support learning for years to come. This is a simple but needed gift and one that can spark a career and change a life".



**To learn more, call Emily:  
215-634-2000 ext. 258**

## Known by the Company We Keep:

**The Philadelphia business community supports Academy Job Seekers**

*by Michael G. Fiore, BSE, MBA, CFO, The Sierra Group, Inc.*

Twelve business leaders representing seven area businesses met with 26 Academy students last month in an effort to promote their job readiness skills. Leaders from area businesses volunteered their time to review resumes, test skills, inspire confidence, and search for talent as part of our *Taking The Next Step* class learning lab. Brenda Wilson, an Academy student, offered that, "meeting with professionals from businesses allowed me to sharpen my skills and feel pride in all that I have learned through my customized training process. These learning lab events are so important because they teach me that I really am job ready."

In fact, of the 26 students that participated in the learning lab, twelve of them were job ready and in their final phase of training—just like Brenda. Of these students, six of them have



**Philadelphia Business Journal Editor Craig Ey presents to Academy students**

been called for interviews and two job offers have been extended and accepted.

Janet Fiore, CEO of The Sierra Group, notes, "Our business partners recognize that finding talent is the key to any businesses success. They also realize that the students at The Academy have been tested by the process, fortified by training, and come with support from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and other agencies and programs."

## Special thanks to the businesses that participated in this learning lab:

SugarHouse Casino  
Omni Hotel  
The Wistar Institute  
Lowe's

FruitFlowers  
Commonwealth Agency  
ProShred  
Eventricity



## **Challenge Grant: You can help us get new technology for our students**

Every month we write about how technology changes lives. Last month we talked about how the Livescribe Pen changed the life of one student in particular—Colleen Stover. As a result of that article, we have received a challenge from an anonymous donor. If we can get our supporters to donate five new LiveScribe Pens, the donor will match these gifts with five additional new pens.

These pens allow students to capture audio notes along with their written notes in the classroom and quite honestly, have changed the way education happens. So far, our program has 50 pens and we need 10 more to ensure that every student has the tools that they need and the accommodations that work for them.

***You can help by donating  
one LiveScribe Pen.***

***Donating a \$99.95 Pen is easy:***

**Step 1:** Call Emily Coder at (215) 634-2000 ext. 258 and tell her, “I want to be a hero and donate a pen to help you reach your challenge grant goal.”

**Step 2:** Emily will collect your information and send you a thank you letter and receipt (for tax purposes).

It's that easy. We need 5 people to call to make a donation to our LiveScribe Pen Challenge!

## **The Real Marketplace: What every business person knows**

***by Michael G. Fiore, BSE, MBA, CFO, The Sierra Group, Inc.***

As corporate consultants on accessibility, compliance, and disability issues, The Sierra Group, Inc. brings a valuable set of skills and resources to The Academy program that is supported by our Foundation. As we interact with businesses, HR professionals, operational managers, attorneys, and executives, we have developed an understanding of the skills needed to secure and maintain competitive employment. While job descriptions, O\*Net, and other resources offer insight into the expectations of a business, our work, combined with our own practical experience, allows us to see around the unspoken corners of the business landscape. This information is not hidden in the realm of the mystic, nor is it difficult to observe. It is, as they say, often hidden in plain sight—it is based on the understanding that business prizes, above all else, productivity over busyness. A seemingly simple idea, yet often confused when looking to discern the competitive potential within a candidate.

While competitive training efforts often endeavor to create a balanced constellation of skills within a candidate—and this is important—businesses tend to look for key skills based on clearly (and often internally known and not outwardly communicated) operational needs. Business owners and managers often see their enterprises as complex engines with many moving parts. All are important and all serve a function,

but not every gear in the machine needs to be perfectly round; metaphorically speaking. Indeed, a recent article in the current Harvard Business Review on Reviving Entrepreneurship speaks to the need to leverage diverse skills in ad-hoc team settings.

How does this insight speak to the work of The Academy? While it is the clear intent of the program to impart competitive skills to willing learners through the equalizing tools known as assistive technologies, it is also the intent to highlight those comparative differences embodied within each student so that they can write their own personal narrative of where they can inspire impact on an organizational level.

Businesses respond to solutions that satisfy their needs. Our skill is in understanding that job description is just one way to get the business to their goal. Creativity, accommodation, skills, and a deep understanding of why productivity matters to a business helps us find volunteer positions, internships, and placements that satisfy all parties. It is the cornerstone to our success in the commercial marketplace and allows us to find and build solid business relationships.

In our effort to reduce the unemployment rate for people with disabilities, a deep and growing understanding of the needs of business drive us to know the marketplace—because, that's where the jobs are.



## Market Ready: Our Second New Office 2010 Computer Lab Opens

by Kelly Murtaugh

Meeting marketplace needs means keeping our mainstream technology as up to date as our assistive technology. Working with Philadelphia Fight /Digital Inclusion, TechSoup.org, and The Sierra Group Foundation, we have secured and launched our second hi-tech classroom. The ten new systems allow students to explore Windows 7 and Office 2010 Professional. Using the upgraded version of Office allows students to build skills working with and managing PDF files while they gain access to collaboration titles such as MS SharePoint and OneNote.

Chris Hyson, Academy Instructor and Assistive Technology Manager offers, "Technical innovation lies at the heart of this program and helping students learn and explore new features in Office Professional

allows them to meet the needs and expectations of the marketplace." Janet Fiore, CEO of The Sierra Group, states, "preparing students to find success needs technology, but technology is only a tool. This new classroom, along with our other technical advances in the program, compel us to update our training methods and models as we work with more and more business leaders in an effort to demonstrate that skill comes in all forms—and ability is the key measure of how far a person can travel."

The Academy invites you to tour our new class space and check out our video conferencing, web-based training, and remote support training and technology tools. The Academy is quickly becoming a space where innovation and accommodation meet.

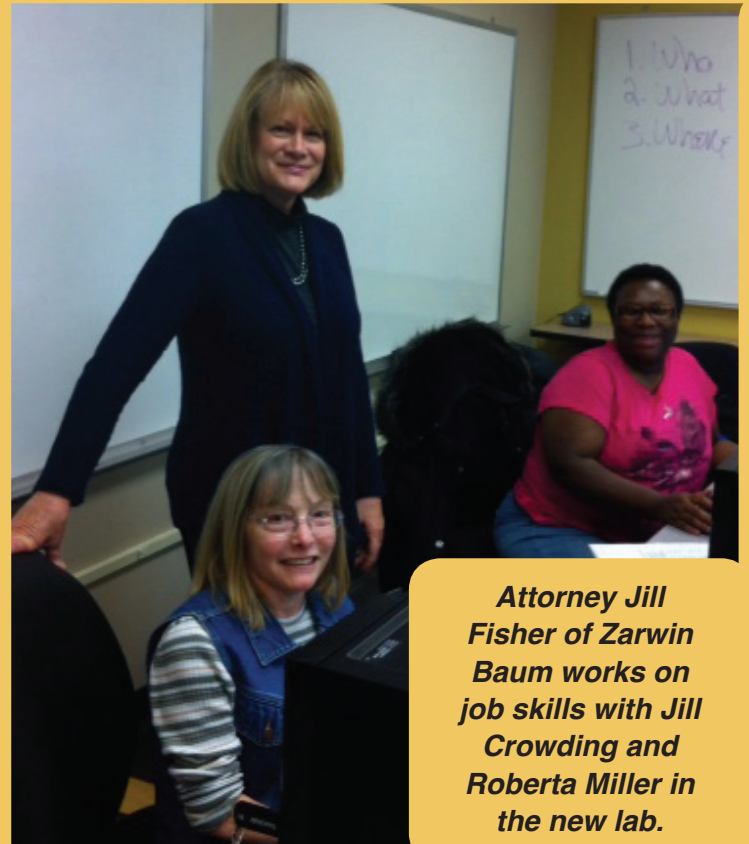
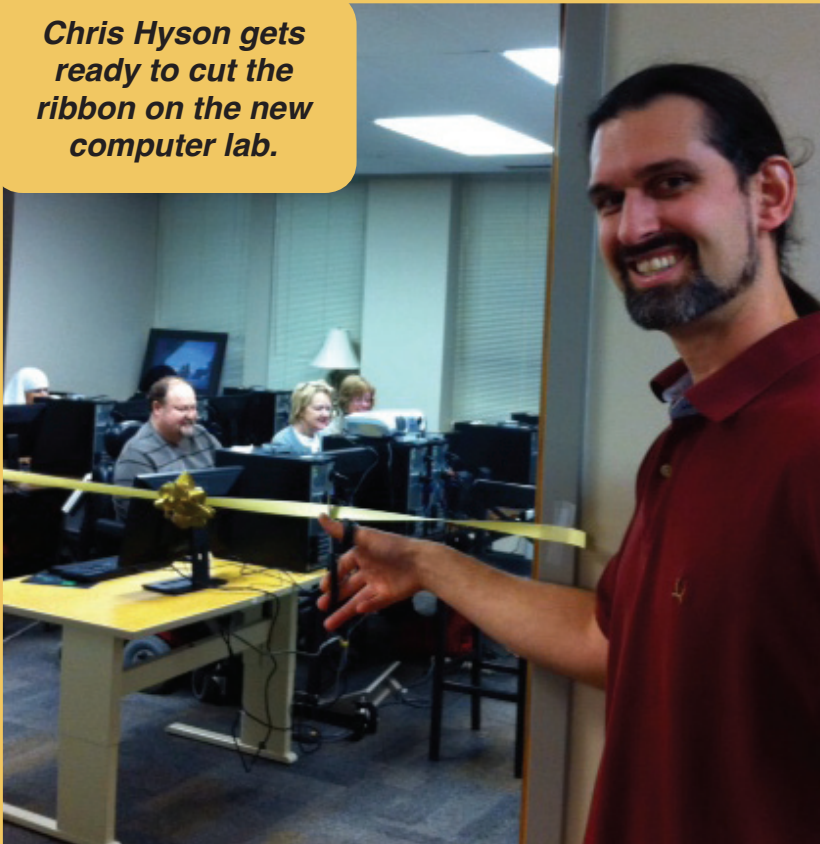
**We wish to thank the following groups for supporting our new hi-tech Classroom:**

Philadelphia Fight /  
Digital Inclusion

TechSoup

The Sierra Group  
Foundation

**Chris Hyson gets ready to cut the ribbon on the new computer lab.**



**Attorney Jill Fisher of Zarwin Baum works on job skills with Jill Crowding and Roberta Miller in the new lab.**

Sharpen your **skills**. Leverage the **technology**. Get the **job**.



*Janice McGrane addresses an Academy writing class as Janet Fiore looks on.*

## Inspired Skill in the Classroom: Sr. Janice McGrane tutors Writing Classes

Sr. Janice McGrane was a writing teacher early in her career and also has published two books, *Saints to Lean On* and *Saints for Healing*. In blending her own story of disability with her writing skills and teaching abilities, she was able to spark a warm and wonderful discussion with the students in the Writing Class last month—and now routinely tutors students in our writing class.

“Bringing experts from the community into the classroom makes the writing process real and tangible,” says Janet Fiore, classroom instructor. Fiore adds, “Janice connects with people and is able to demonstrate success as a woman of profound faith and an accomplished and published author. This is a powerful message for all of us.” Janice, who has lived with rheumatoid arthritis since she was 25, was prompted by her own experience to begin writing.

[www.lriacademy.org](http://www.lriacademy.org)

Academy Works



714 Market Street, Suite 100  
Philadelphia, PA 19106  
(215) 634-2000 ext. 203 voice/tty  
(215) 925-1157 fax  
(888) 634-2155 toll free  
[www.lriacademy.org](http://www.lriacademy.org)