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Aromas Goes Wireless

Internet Users Forsake Phone Lines, Surf on Radio Waves

Aromas is the place where a good cup of coffee gets you wired. Now, it's also the place where you can get unwired Internet access.

In May, the Maher Hall coffeehouse became home to USD's first public wireless port, which enables laptop computer users to connect to the Internet without plugging into a phone jack.

The technology lets people surf the Web on radio waves, casting off their cables and navigating the 'Net from anywhere within the coffeehouse, or even outside on the patio.

"You're no longer chained to the wall," says Thor Brickman, student systems manager in student computing.

"You can sit in the middle of the room or go outside and get on the Internet from almost as far away as the fountain."

To go wireless, laptop users must purchase a port card, a credit card-sized device that is inserted into the computer and communicates with a wireless port. Aromas' port — it's the big white box on the southeast wall — transmits radio waves that carry about 300 feet.

Greatest Show on Earth Comes to Campus

As the saying goes, it's for ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, and kids of all ages. It's the greatest show on earth, and it's coming to USD.

On June 29, the Copley Library lawn will be transformed into a three-ring circus — complete with a big-top tent, balloon-wielding clowns and a ringmaster named Barnaby — for the 17th Annual Staff Employee Recognition Picnic.

"This started out as something so small," says picnic organizer Calista Davis of human resources. "The first year, the president and vice presidents personally barbecued the burgers. There were fewer than 100 people there. Last year we had 800."

Pam Bourne, special assistant to the vice president of student affairs, says she loves seeing her co-workers dress up in costumes, let down their hair and have a good time.

"Sometimes we all get caught up in the work we do," says Bourne, who has been at USD for 15 years. "But I like seeing people willing to put themselves out there for one day, do something silly and know it's OK. It makes for good working relationships after the picnic is over."

Barnaby, the master of ceremonies who uses comedy to facilitate team-building workshops for Fortune 500 companies, will rely on music, magic and laughter to get people involved. The festivities begin at noon and include games, contests, prizes, a barbecue lunch, clowns, caricaturists and a giant, inflatable slide.

Five-year service certificates will be presented, followed by the naming of the administrator of the year by the Staff Employees Association and finally, the crowning event, the presentation of the 2001 Manuel Hernandez Staff Employee of the Year award. Employees celebrating other anniversaries — in five-year increments — will be honored at the service award celebration in December.

Employees are encouraged to bring their families, and retirees are invited back to catch up with former colleagues.

"The picnic is just one thing we do to say thank you," says Davis, who has been involved with the picnic since it started nearly two decades ago. "Saying thank you may seem like a small thing, but it is so important and means so much to people."

Picnic invitations will be sent out this month. Tickets are mandatory and can be picked up at the University Center box office. Employees are admitted for free. Tickets for adult guests are $8, children's tickets are $5.
For the Love of Their Teacher

Cindy Grandee, a teacher at the Manchester Family Child Development Center, provides constant love and support to her students. Now they’re returning the favor.

Grandee was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a mastectomy in 1993. She discovered earlier this year that the cancer had returned and spread to the bones in her skull, spine, hips and ribs.

So the children, staff and parents at the Child Development Center organized a concert to help Grandee with her substantial medical bills. Featuring New York-based children’s singer Laurie Berkner — whose songs the children at the center know and love — the concert is set for 3 p.m., June 10, in Shiley Theatre. Grandee’s friends and students hope to raise $10,000.

Berkner, a former preschool teacher, performed at last year’s White House Easter Egg Hunt as well as at the birthday parties of the children of both Madonna and Sting.

“Everyone here has been great,” Grandee says. “I’ve had people offer to let me stay in their homes, cook me meals and clean my house. This has all been overwhelming, and I’ve been blessed to have so many wonderful people around me. I can actually feel their prayers.”

“I could stay home, but I want to come to work because it takes my mind off everything,” Grandee says. “And it helps to always have a little child talking to me.”

Grandee, 42, is taking tamoxifen, an estrogen blocker that impedes the growth of cancerous tumors. She also relies on holistic remedies such as a healthy diet, vitamins, immune building supplements and acupuncture sessions.

“These treatments are working, but they’re expensive,” says CDC director Jacqueline Corey Kennedy. “We’ll do whatever we can for her because she has a long life ahead of her and a lot of things left to do, and we know she’ll get a chance to do those things.”

Concert tickets are $15. To buy tickets, make a contribution or donate a prize for a drawing, call the Child Development Center at (619) 260-4620.

Benefits Briefs

Retirement Orientation: A retirement orientation open to everyone is scheduled for 10-11:30 a.m., June 26, to provide an overview of USD’s three retirement companies: VALIC, TIAA-CREF and Scudder. Please call ext. 6537 for location information or to make a reservation.

Kaiser Permanente Travel Guide: Kaiser Travel Guides are available in human resources during regular business hours. If you travel outside of the normal service area, this guide will assist you in receiving services as a visiting member.

Summer Dependent Care: Only a select group of summer camps are eligible for reimbursement through a dependent care reimbursement account. The sponsor must be a licensed daycare provider such as the YMCA, the Boys & Girls Club or the Jewish Community Center. Please check with camp directors to see if their programs qualify under these guidelines. Summer overnight camps and kindergarten fees cannot be reimbursed under current IRS guidelines.

Health Care Reimbursement Reminder: Keep in mind that every trip to the doctor, dentist, pharmacy or health-care provider is eligible for reimbursement at 12 cents per mile for employees who have a health-care reimbursement account. Parking, bus, train and other transportation fees are also reimbursable with proper receipts.

Employee Assistance Program: USD’s employee assistance program, administered by an outside firm called Integrated Insights, formerly HHRC, is available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. Integrated Insights may be reached by calling (800) 342-8111.

— Debbie Anderson
SEA Backs Faculty Request to Study Benefits Upgrade

The Staff Employees Association at its May meeting voted to send a memo to President Alice B. Hayes acknowledging support of two actions recently taken by the University Senate.

The SEA backed a motion passed by the University Senate recommending that the president convene a health benefits task force. The group would look into upgrading USD's medical insurance benefits during the next three years so they equal or exceed coverage levels provided by comparable institutions.

The memo also outlined SEA support for a senate recommendation that USD join a consortium for tuition exchange, which would allow employees to use tuition remission benefits at other universities.

"This is an important moment at the university," says Margie Carroll, chair of the SEA's benefits committee. "The faculty and staff have come together for a common need in light of USD's mission statement and commitment to justice."

The president is reviewing both issues and plans to report back to the University Senate in the fall.

Hayes says she is considering USD membership in a consortium called The Tuition Exchange, which has hundreds of public and private university members nationwide offering undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs. She has asked Provost Frank Lazarus to review the terms of membership and recommend what portion of USD tuition remission benefits should be allocated.

The health benefits discussion came in the wake of a forum sponsored recently by the SEA and the American Association of University Professors, at which some employees said the USD benefits package is not on par with other universities.

Employees are concerned in particular that benefits don't cover costs for vision care or medical costs for dependents, says University Senate Chair Daniel Sheehan.

"The values of the university are such that it should support families and the general welfare of its employees better than it has been," Sheehan says. "It's in the president's court now, and we've asked her to report back in a timely manner."

Rather than conducting a study that isolates the rates and components of medical benefits offered elsewhere, Hayes ordered a study of entire compensation packages at other institutions.

"I think it's a mistake to take one aspect of compensation out," Hayes says. "We're looking at the entire package to get the whole picture."

Hayes says other elements of the USD benefits package already have been upgraded in areas that affect employees across the board. In particular, she cites staff salaries, which recently were raised, and retirement plans, to which the university contributes 12 percent of an employee's salary. She adds, however, that unlike salary and retirement benefits, medical benefits can differ among employees, depending on whether they have dependents.

"Very naturally, people with dependents are interested in medical benefits, and I want to see if that's universal," Hayes says. "I want to have more conversations with people about how they recommend that the compensation resources be distributed. If we make changes, they will not be distributed evenly, and there has to be that understanding."

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Aromas

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Wireless technology was first tested on campus about a year ago in the student computing department and nearby lounge in the University Center. Two more locations will go wireless this summer — the School of Business Administration and Traditions, which will be renovated and open in the fall as the Torero Grille. Eventually the whole campus will be wireless.

"Aromas was the right place to start because of its atmosphere," says Loryn Johnson, marketing and development manager for dining services. "It looks like a study hall. In the deli students are socializing or getting a bite before class, but in Aromas they're hanging out, studying and carrying around laptops the way we previously carried around notebooks."
Remembering her brush with fame, Jo Powers, executive assistant in the provost’s office, might feel like belting out “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” or humming “If they could see me now,” the cruise line jingle sung by Kathie Lee Gifford.

Powers, husband Bob and daughter Meghan, a sophomore at USD, were passengers last year on a special Padres Carnival Cruise to the Mexican Riviera. They rubbed elbows with manager Bruce Bochy, catcher Ben Davis and pitcher Carlton Loewer.

"Everyone was so warm, fun and down to earth," Powers says of the seven-day December trip. "It was fun to be chummy with them."

En route to Puerto Vallarta, Mazatlan and Cabo San Lucas aboard the Elation, Powers and other passengers had a chance to play pingpong, eat dinner, dance, swim, sing, run relay races and even parasail with the players, their families and other members of the Padres staff.

Powers ate dinner with Loewer, who talked about growing up in Louisiana and offered tips on how to eat crawdads. She listened to Davis croon a country song for a radio station and watched Bochy struggle to draw an animal in a game of “Win, Lose or Draw.”

“The first night we were just fans who were excited about getting autographs on our baseballs,” Powers says. “After that, we were like one big happy family.”

This year’s first home game found the family at Qualcomm Stadium, rooting on their favorite players and meeting them at a nearby restaurant for a cruise reunion.

“Bruce Bochy and his wife came, walked onto the patio and gave us hugs,” Powers says. “It meant so much to see them again. It was a vacation we’ll never forget.”

The Alcalá View wants to hear about your brushes with fame. Send an e-mail to Krystn Shrieve at kshrieve@sandiego.edu or call her at ext. 4934 to share your story.

Meet H.R.

At previous jobs he was dubbed the boss of benefits, the pioneer of payroll, the honcho of hiring, the ruler of retirement and, of course, the veteran of vacations.

His name is H.R. and he’s an ace at answering questions about human resources. The Alcalá View has enlisted his help, so he’s packed his bag and is headed to campus to field inquiries about the rules for long-term disability, qualifying for tuition remission, how often employees can make changes in their retirement plans, the proper way to handle a grievance or any other issue that may have staffers stumped. So, if you’ve got a question, don’t be shy — ask H.R.

Send your questions to Ask H.R. in Maher Hall, Room 274, or e-mail askhr@sandiego.edu.