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LA JOLLA LIGHT

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Calling iPhone newbies

La Jolla Community Center teaches tech to seniors

By ELISABETH FRAUSTO

The La Jolla Community Center's first online class to teach senior citizens to use an iPad or iPhone is drawing to a close, but not to worry — enrollment for a second course is underway.

The free iPad & iPhone Basics class, in its ninth week of 10, is taught via Zoom by LJCC administrative assistant Deborah Miller and covers the basics, from hardware lessons on what each button does to an explanation of settings and text messaging.

Miller also teaches accessibility features that she said class members find useful, such as making the screen brighter or text bigger or having the phone announce calls.

She also infuses fun topics into her classes, like how to add balloons and confetti to text messages, and is available to meet with students one on one for advanced help or a refresher of what was covered in class.

The eighth session of the class, which the La Jolla Light attended, included a review of the Photos app, including how it's organized, the "For You" feature that creates albums and effects based on a personalized algorithm and how to search photos by date, location, objects or people.

Miller also taught how to create a photo album and share it publicly or with a few people, and answered questions on the Photos app's "Live" function.

"This is complicated stuff," participant Faye Girsh said.

The concept for the class was based on an earlier, in-person version taught by another instructor. It was revamped virtually this year after a sharp increase in need as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, when people were asked to isolate and in-person socializing came to a halt.

When the pandemic began more than a year ago, "we had some members that were still using flip phones," Miller said. "They had to go and upgrade just so they could join classes on Zoom or see their family online."

She said seniors who were "really hesitant" about using technology "had to embrace it."



Deborah Miller (center in top row) teaches an online class on how to use an iPad or iPhone, hoping to help senior citizens use technology to stay close to people during the pandemic. (Courtesy)

“I started with meeting with seniors one on one — over the phone or just socially distanced,” teaching them how to use Zoom and its basic features, Miller said.

From those informal lessons, the iPad and iPhone class evolved, she said. “It’s been a learning experience for all of us.”

Miller said she thinks “it’s fun to explain how to operate a device to seniors and witness their ‘ah-ha’ moment.” With simple instruction, “they gain confidence.”

Miller’s father was in computer programming and she was uploading software as a child. “I’ve always enjoyed technology and how it could simplify tasks,” she said. “Now I have a chance to teach something I love and hopefully help seniors simplify tasks and make connections with friends and family using their devices.”

CarolAnn Plain, who has taken Miller’s class since its second session, has had her iPhone for eight years and used “the very basic things for many years.”

“There’s lots of features on it I don’t know how to use, and I just thought this was a good opportunity to learn with other people in my community,” Plain said.

She said Miller “has such a gentle, guiding style that I really love. [She] just answers [questions] so simply and with such patience; it’s just special.”

Student Jean Fort said that six weeks ago, she “was a total newbie to iPhones, having been a PC person all my computing life. I had decided to get an iPhone rather than an Android because all my friends had one and I thought they might be able to help me learn it. Well, there has been no need for me to ask my friends questions, because Deborah covers it all.”

Miller’s class has made the adjustment to the iPhone easy, Fort said. “Her presentations are models of clarity,” with many examples, she said. “The icing on the cake is that she is so pleasant, and it is a fun class.”

The next 10-week session of the iPad & iPhone Basics course begins Monday, April 19, though participants may join at any time. For more information, visit ljcommunitycenter.org/series. ♦