

The Newport Daily News

March 9, 2009

A Newport Met School sophomore forms his own business to refurbish computers.

By Joe Baker
Daily News staff

NEWPORT — Computers have always interested Slater Harnett. The 16-year-old Newport resident got his first laptop when he was just 7.

So when he had to find an internship project as a freshman at the Newport Met School, he naturally turned to computers. And Harnett's love for the inner workings of computers blossomed during the year he spent under the guidance of Ned Hill at Small Business Computers Inc. on Dr. Marcus F. Wheatland Boulevard.

Now a sophomore, Harnett has taken his digital love affair a step further by starting Purple 8, his own computer recycling business.

It's not recycling in the most commonly accepted sense. What Harnett does is take in computers that don't work, retool them, and, if he can get them working, donate them to nonprofit organizations or people who can't afford their own computers.

"It's more re-purposing than recycling," said Bill Harnett, his father.

Right now the teenager operates his fledgling business out of the basement of his father's Post All shop in the Wellington Square plaza. He is soliciting anyone he knows for their old computers to see if he can work his magic on them.

Harnett has secured a \$1,000 startup grant from Youth Venture, a national organization dedicated to helping young entrepreneurs.

"It is clear that any young person who has an idea for improving his or her community, leads a team, launches a venture and contributes something lasting will emerge transformed from such an experience," the group explains on its Web site. "Young 'venturers' will know that they are capable of leading and creating change, and it is likely that they will take initiative again and again over a lifetime."

Harnett also sought the help of noted philanthropist Alan Shawn Feinstein. Less than 15 minutes after he sent Feinstein an e-mail explaining his venture, the philanthropist called him personally. Although Feinstein said he couldn't help with funding for the project because it wasn't a nonprofit organization, he encouraged Harnett to continue his work and said he might be able to help in the future.

During his year's internship under Hill, Harnett discovered that it was the inner workings of the computer — as opposed to programming — that interested him. He actually built his own computer while working for Hill. Harnett is furthering that interest this year as he continues a second internship at Computer Man on Broadway.

"I hope I'm involved with computers," Harnett said when asked what he'd like to do after graduating.

And as for the name of his company, Purple 8? No mystery there. Purple is his favorite color and "8" is his favorite number. After all, it's right in his first name — Sl8ter.

Anyone wishing to donate old computer equipment to Harnett can e-mail him at Purple8@rocketmail.com.

Printed with permission from The Newport (R.I.) Daily News, March 9, 2009.