Best Bytes

Need help mastering your computer? Here's
a sampling of seminars and training programs
around the state. By Robert W. Bly

When business executive Richard Coleman tried to use Lotus 1-2-3 to do sales projections on his IBM Personal Computer, he found it slow going. "Lotus is powerful but not terribly friendly," he says. "In a way, using software is like learning to speak French or play the piano—you could study it on your own, but you can speed up the learning curve if you take a course." After completing two Lotus courses at Executive Computer Network, a Fairfield-based training center, Coleman is at ease with Lotus, using it to work on business data every day.

Susan Chertok had a tougher training requirement. As a PC analyst with Volvo North America, she is expected to be the resident corporate expert in dBase, Lotus, and other IBM software products. But her experience was with Apple computers, not IBM. The solution? A five-course program of study at Corporate Educational Services, a computer training organization in Paramus. The results? "I am knowledgeable enough to answer users' questions about these IBM applications," she says proudly. "CES has made me an expert."

Rita M. was apprehensive about learning to use the computer system in her company's personnel department, where she works as a wages and benefits coordinator. A two-day course at CES helped her overcome her fears. "People who have never used a computer are very fearful of it, so they need individual instruction," she says. "If you take a course, make sure classes are small, so you can get personal attention from the instructor."

Like Rita, Richard, and Susan, thousands of New Jerseyans are acquiring personal computers at home and at work. Many find they need help in mastering these unfamiliar beasts. But how do you find computer courses that meet your needs? And how do you know which ones to choose? Here is a quick and easy guide to some of the computer seminars and training programs offered in the state.
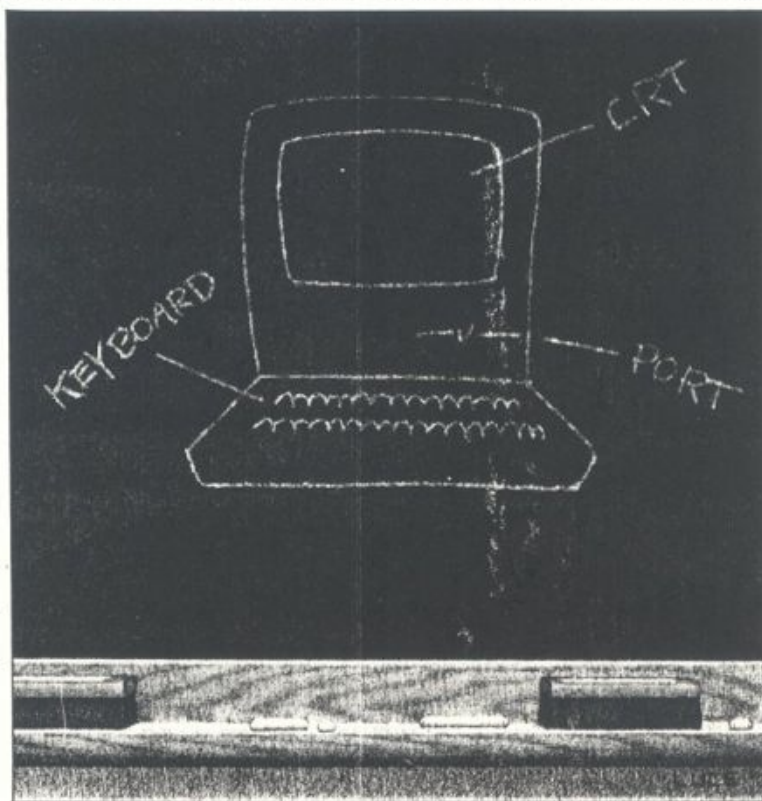
The best way to get started is to decide exactly what you want to learn. Do you want an overview of computers? Are you looking for training in a particular program? Do you want to gain a new skill or prepare for a new career, or are you simply seeking information? Next, look over the course descriptions to find the ones that meet your goals. Call or write to the organizations and ask them to send you information on their programs and individual seminars. Then ask the sponsor or instructor any questions you may have. Be sure the course is geared to your experience: Ask if there are any prerequisites. It's also often best to start with a short seminar, then sign up for a longer course if you want to learn more. Also find out if the school owns its own computer equipment. The best way to learn is to sit at a computer and *use* it; look for courses where classrooms are equipped with microcomputers, terminals, and software.

Check out the instructor's background as well as the course description and outline. "The material in these types of seminars is often fairly similar from one school to the next," says Chad Elson, director of Interactive Communications in Montclair, a company that offers computer training. "Look for a company that specializes in training and communication; don't go to a data processing (DP) consultant, computer manufacturer, or software vendor. You want a teacher who talks in English rather than technical jargon."

Another factor is the quality of the training materials. Bonnie Williams, training coordinator of CES, explains: "It's impossible to memorize everything in a course. But with a good student manual, you're able to go over what you learned step by step on your own after the course is over." Also desirable, she says, is a telephone hot line that graduates can call for follow-up help.

The listings below are just a sampling of what's available throughout the state. Why did these particular courses make our "best bytes" list? Three reasons:

—The teachers know their subjects but also have a talent for presenting concepts in plain English.

—The sponsors have a track record of success, with many satisfied customers—both individual and corporate clients.

—Most seminars offer a combination of lectures and hands-on

training. Excellent course materials and manuals were also taken into account.

Don't confine your search to these listings. If the courses below don't fit your needs or are too far for you to travel, check your local high schools, vocational training schools, community colleges and universities, and look under "computer training" in the Yellow Pages.

Airco Computer Learning Center, *160 Route 4 East, Paramus 07652 (201-845-6868).*

If you're making a career change to computer programming, data processing, word processing, or you're trying to broaden your working knowledge of computers, Airco Computer Learning Center offers education with the assistance of counseling, financial aid, and job placement.

Career program training includes personal computers, Lotus 1-2-3, dBase III Plus, MultiMate, MultiMate Advantage, WordStar 2000 and 2000 Plus. All training is done on IBM-related equipment. Hands-on training is provided at the center or at your location.

Fees range from $125 to $250 for corporate training (group rates are available) and from $3,000 to $6,000 for career training.

American Institute, *Carnegie Building, 55 Main Street, Madison 07940 (201-822-1230).*

This nonprofit organization serving the educational needs of business professionals offers a number of computer-related seminars in New Jersey. A particularly noteworthy one is Networking the IBM PC, which teaches students how to link individual PCs to communicate with one another. The seminar covers such topics as data communications standards and protocols, Ether net, Local Area Network software, Integrated Voice and Data Communications, Lotus 1-2-3 for Financial Managers, and IBM XTIAT. Fees run from $625 to $1195.

Associated Business Careers, *203 Black Horse Pike, Haddon Heights 08035 (609-546-0803 or 344-1954).*

According to president Michael Tedesco, "Associated Business Careers is a computer/secretarial school approved by the Department of Education in Trenton and also accredited by the Association of Independent Colleges and Schools. We specialize in short courses for the unemployed, the underemployed, the recent high school graduate."

It offers career training in data input/processing, word processing/secretarial, and "Computer Plus," an advanced word-processing/secretarial program. Students train on modern equipment, such as IBM, Tandy, Olivetti, Wang, Logic, and Exxon.

Campuses are in Atlantic City, Trenton, and Audubon Park, with corporate offices in Haddon Heights. Each career program provides 720 hours of instruction over a six-month period (six hours a day, five days a week) for a fee of $4,155.

Businessland, *2080 East Marlton Pike, Cherry Hill (609-751-1702).*

Businessland offers an extensive customer training program to help you become productive on your personal computer. Courses are taught by fulltime instructors who combine teaching skills and computer knowledge with business experience. The Cherry Hill facility is fully equipped with computers, so students can get hands-on practice.

Courses are offered on word processing, spread sheets, integrated products (Symphony, Framework), data bases, plus an introductory course for novices, Getting Started with Your PC. Most courses take half a day and cost $95 to $125 a student.

CES Training Center, *10 Forest Avenue, Paramus 07652 (201-843-6444).*

CES offers a wide selection of reasonably priced computer seminars to local businesses. In addition to training a company's employees directly, CES also has programs for "trainers" who can then give instruction to others in the firm.

Courses cover the more popular business-application programs, including Lotus 1-2-3, dBase III Plus, WordStar, MultiMate Advantage, and DisplayWrite 4. They also have a number of seminars on topics not generally offered elsewhere; these include Networking and Communications, Managing with Microcomputers, Microcomputer Literacy for Trainers, and Designing and Developing Computer Based Training.

All courses are hands-on, with one computer per student in most classes, which are limited to ten students. Students who complete a course have use of a telephone help line. CES can also customize a training program to a particular company's requirements. Training facilities are in Paramus, Somerset, and near the World Trade Center in New York.

"Some people really don't know where to start," says Bonnie Williams. "For them, I recommend an overview course—which talks about issues such as the use of data, the computer as a management tool, and major types of applications."

Adds CES alumnus Susan Chertok: "CES does an especially good job of dealing with students who have widely different levels of experience. Once we sent them ten people to train—five novices and five with experience. All came out of the class with a good working knowledge of the application."

Seminars range from half a day to four days, depending on the subject. Fees run from $75 to $850; group discounts are available.

The Chubb Institute, *8 Sylvan Way, P.O. Box 342, Parsippany 07054-0342 (201-682-4900).*

The Chubb Institute provides training in three separate areas: technical courses for data-processing professionals, introductory computer courses for non-data-processing managers, and career training for people who are or want to be programmers or operators. ♦

Their three-day course, Data Processing for the non-DP Manager, teaches nontechnical managers how to work with their company's DP staff and how to make the best use of DP services and equipment. Students learn how to get the DP department to provide them with systems and applications to meet their information needs. The fee is $545.

Data Systems Computer Centre, *35 Fadem Road, Springfield 07081 (201-467-2300).*

Data Systems specializes in IBM PC training. They offer a wide range of classes for people who will be using, choosing, and purchasing computers and software for themselves or their organizations. What's unique is the full range of courses available on each topic, ranging from overviews to detailed instruction for experienced users.

The courses include Introduction to IBM PC DOS (Disk Operating System), Advanced DOS, Harvard Desktop Publishing, and HP Laser Jet training. Other programs teach you to use Lotus 1-2-3, Advanced Lotus, Symphony, dBase III Plus, and word-processing programs including DisplayWrite 4, MultiMate Advantage, Word Perfect, Microsoft Word, and Paradox.

Courses are from half a day to two days, with fees of $150 to $395. Day and evening sessions are offered year-round. All classes are held at training centers in Springfield and New York, both fully equipped with IBM PCs and compatible computers.

Executive Computer Network Inc., *373 Route 46 West, Fairfield Business Campus, Fairfield 07006 (201-575-5552).*

Executive Computer Network offers a series of one-day courses designed primarily for business people. Classes, which take place at training centers in Paramus, Fairfield, and Edison, feature hands-on learning, and each student practices on his or her own computer.

One popular course, "Introduction to the PC and DOS," offers beginners a quick introduction. Students learn how to format floppy disks, create files, use programs, and get the printer to work. Other one-day ECN seminars deal with such popular application programs as MultiMate Advantage, DisplayWrite 4, WordStar, Microsoft Word, dBase III Plus, R:BASE System V, Lotus 1-2-3 version 2, Symphony, and Harvard Total Project Manager. "What sets ECN apart from everyone else is that they allow you to repeat a course, free of charge, within six months after you take it," notes alumnus Richard Coleman. He repeated a Lotus course to reinforce what he learned and advises students to take advantage of this opportunity.

Introductory, intermediate, and advanced courses are available. Seminar fees range from $200 to $300. Group discounts are available. Students can repeat a course for free, and get 30 days' use of a free telephone hot line.

Fairleigh Dickinson University, *Division of Continuing Education, Madison Campus, 285 Madison Avenue, Madison 07940 (201-593-8666).*

A number of computer seminars are open to the general public, including Fundamentals of Personal Computers for Managers, Advanced Lotus, How to Use Your IBM PC, and Computer Literacy for Executive Secretaries. Seminars held in the past have touched upon such topics as telecommunications management, data communications concepts and systems, data bases, and computer crime and security.

Call to have your name added to the mailing list to receive bulletins of future seminars. The fee for a two-day seminar is about $495.

Glen Rock Community School, *600 Harristown Road, Glen Rock 07452 (201-445-4011).*

The Glen Rock Community School, open to all New Jersey residents, offers several courses in business software including Lotus 1-2-3, MultiMate Advantage, dBase III, Appleworks, and Introduction to Computers.

Fees range from $38 to $93. The best bargain is the school's introductory course in computer programming. For only $38, you get sixteen hours of training (two hours a week for eight weeks), and each student has his or her own microcomputer. Instructor Richard Stevens teaches classes how to write and run programs in BASIC, the simplest programming language. No previous knowledge is required.

Interactive Communications Inc., *190 Fernwood Avenue, Upper Montclair 07043 (201-744-1554).*

Interactive Communications specializes in individualized training for groups of two or three people. Seminars are given to corporate workers at company sites and typically take eight hours. Fees range from $75 to $125 an hour, depending on the topic. Courses are offered on MultiMate Advantage, WordStar, WordStar 2000, Paradox, PC, and MS DOS, as well as courses for first-time computer users. Courses are aimed at interesting novices in using a computer and making them knowledgeable enough to be productive.

Learning and Computer Resource Academy, *Schoolhouse Plaza, 236 Millbrook Avenue, Randolph 07869 (201-989-8885).*

The academy offers a variety of courses for children aged three and up. These include word processing, programming in BASIC, Logo computer language, an overview course ("Computer Orientation"), plus IBM's new Writing to Read program.

"Writing to Read is not just a computer program but an entire language arts system using the computer as a teaching tool," says Peggy Lahs, computer resource director. "It teaches children to write anything that they can say and to read what they write."

"I think the academy's Writing to Read program is great," says Elke Rebernik,

whose six-year-old daughter, Nicole, recently completed the course. "We have a computer at home, and Nicole was scared of it. The course has given her a lot of confidence in spelling, reading, writing, and computers."

Weekday, Saturday, and summer sessions are available. Courses range from six to twelve hours. The fee is $350 for twelve hours of training.

Methodology Data Inc. *(MDI), P.O. Box 367, Piscataway 08854 (201-738-5600).*

MDI offers courses in programming languages (FORTRAN, PL/1, COBOL, C), data base management systems (Ramis, Focus), and operating systems (UNIX, VM/CMS) for both programmers and end-users who work with mainframe computer systems on the job. They also have personal computing courses on such topics as Lotus, dBase III Plus, DOS, Samna Word III, WordStar, OS12, and the Cross Talk telecommunications program.

One especially valuable course offering, "UNIX for End-Users," is designed to teach nontechnical people how to use UNIX, which is becoming a standard industry operating system. Topics include UNIX electronic mail, report generation, and text editors.

Courses, which range from one to five days, are held at MDI or in company offices. At MDI fees are $150 a student per day. On company premises, the cost is $895 a day for a class of up to sixteen students.

MicroAge Computer Stores, *66 Route 4 East, Paramus 07652 (201-843-5678).*

Like many training centers, MicroAge offers the usual courses on IBM PC, WordStar, Word Perfect, MultiMate Advantage, and Lotus 1-2-3. It also has a number of courses covering topics not usually offered elsewhere, including Enable, Framework III, Advanced DOS, R:BASE, and Paradox.

Classes generally take three to four hours, although some are longer. Fees are about $50 an hour.

New Milford Community School, *P.O. Box 346, New Milford 07646 (201-262-0156).*

This community school offers a number of inexpensive courses for beginners, including Introduction to Computer-Aided Drafting, Introduction to Robotics Programming, Data Processing, Introduction to Microcomputers, Word Processing, and Computer Training for Teachers. Fees range from $45 to $125. There's also a $30 introductory course, "Understanding Personal Computers," offered on a home-study basis.

On-Line Software International, *Fort Lee Executive Park, Two Executive Drive, Fort Lee 07024 (201-592-0009).*

On-Line offers advanced training for data-processing professionals plus public and private seminars dealing with CICS, IMS, VTAM, VSAM, and RAMIS mainframe software at the application, system, and design levels. Training takes place at the client's site or at On-Line's Advanced Training Center in Englewood Cliffs. Courses have

well-structured agendas on practical programming, debugging, and design work plus important systems theory. On-Line is continually developing new seminars on the latest IBM software.

Seminars last one to five days and tuition ranges from $270 to $800 a student, depending on the course and number of students from a company.

Performance Development Corporation *(PDC), 45 Montgomery Knoll, CN 861, Princeton 08543 (609-921-3770).*

Information—not goods or materials— may be a company's most valuable asset. Performance Development Corporation offers specialized training to help companies use computers to manage information.

PDC has a series of one- and two-day seminars aimed at helping management, end-users, and other nontechnical people understand computers and information management. Typical courses include Planning the Strategic Information Resource, Evaluating and Selecting Data Base Management Systems, Security Administration, and End-User Computing and the Information Center.

Seminars can be custom-tailored to a company's specific needs. The fee for a one-day seminar held on company premises is $2,500 a day for up to fifteen students ($167 a student) including course materials.

Sochor Computer Schools Inc., *19 Eardley Road, Edison 08817 (201-819-0770).*

Sochor Computer Schools offer a one-day workshop in learning to fix your own computer. According to Robert G. Sochor, course instructor, most repairs can be done easily and inexpensively using common tools. The $225 fee includes a basic tool kit, manual, list of sources, free diagnostic software, some supplies, and a seven-hour training workshop. Computers for students to practice on are provided.   ∎

New Jersey freelance writer Robert W. Bly is the author of fifteen books, including A Dictionary of Computer Words *(1983) and* A Child's History of Computers *(1984), both published by Banbury Books. He has also written for* Computer Decisions, High-Tech Marketing, *and other periodicals. This is his first article for* New Jersey Monthly.