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Athens High School students, Aaron Barte, Anna Leatherwood, and Ohio University PhD student Maria Modayil gather around Sara Gilfert's laptop to help her upload audiobooks to her iPod at the Athens Library.

By SARAH GUINN MESSENGER STAFF JOURNALIST Updated Mar 19, 2016

<http://www.athensmessenger.com/content/tncms/live/>

Athens senior citizen Sara Gilfert got a new iPod three years ago, but hasn't been able to use it or learn how to sync it with iTunes on her MacBook, and wanted to be able to listen to audiobooks on her new device. So it sat around in its case, until she found Athens High School junior Anna Leatherwood.

Gilfert, like many other senior citizens, needed assistance in navigating an ever-expanding digital world, and found the help she needed through service learning project, the Athens Tech Fair, put on through a new service partnership with Ohio University and AHS.

The first-ever OU-AHS service partnership gave students the option to engage in service-projects, ranging from forest clean up at Wayne National Forest, to community garden work at Hope Drive Community gardens and East Elementary, to teaching an older generation how to use the younger generation's technology.

"In the past, AHS had students participate in service learning projects, but with some changes this past year, they didn't have the capacity to enact the project," OU Patton College of Education professor, Michael Kopish

said. “The void provided an opportunity for me to train OU students how to design and enact service learning projects and help the teachers at AHS continue to incorporate service learning.”

OU students Maria Modayil, a PhD candidate, and Riley Carpenter, an undergraduate senior, worked to put together the Athens Tech Fair. Modayil knew there was a need in the community for a technology educator for the Athens Village, a community support system for citizens 60 and older, she said, and thought high school students would be a perfect resource. Carpenter, a gerontology and communications student, wanted to help bridge the gap between the generations, she said. “I’m fascinated with the disconnection and how completely separated my generation and the older generation is,” Carpenter said.

Tables were set up in the Athens Library’s large public room, catering to different areas of technology, from a laptop computer station, to an iPod station, and HTC and Samsung station.

“I’m delighted that all these kids are here, and it’s just terrible there aren’t enough clients coming in,” Gilfert said. “I didn’t realize that the age of (my iPod) was so different...iPods apparently have to work with MacBooks, which I have, and I know that they work together, but just how? And I wanted to borrow books from the library and put them on (my iPod.)”

In students’ downtime, they helped put together pamphlets explaining what an Internet browser is, for example, and how to use it, Modayil explained, which will be printed and available at the Athens Library for people to take and use to familiarize themselves with technology.

Other opportunities allowed students to partner with local veteran’s organizations to interview, record, and transcribe the oral histories of local veterans, and also help make Morrison-Gordon Elementary’s Land Lab Revitalization Project more accessible to younger and disabled students.

“This type of civic engagement affords young people opportunities to explore their identities as members of the public and to enrich their connections to fellow members of the public with a stake in improving their communities,” Kopish wrote in a mini-grant, which funded the service project initiative. “In sum, Service Learning Day is a beneficial experience for Athens High School, Ohio University, and the greater Athens community.”

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