

## Cherry Hill resident giving children in need a boost through computers

Marc Goldstein's nonprofit organization, Computer Smiles, donated refurbished computers to families in need across the region.



The nonprofit organization Computer Smiles operates out of the Cherry Hill home of Susan and Marc Goldstein. Marc founded Computer Smiles in 2017, with the mission of providing computers to families in need across the Philadelphia region.

After working in the family business for more than 40 years, Cherry Hill resident Marc Goldstein decided to retire in 2016. When people asked Goldstein what he was going to do in retirement, he thought of his favorite hobby, tinkering with computers.

However, Goldstein never would have guessed where his hobby would take him in just a couple short years. Late in 2017, Goldstein founded Computer Smiles, a nonprofit organization dedicated to donating computers to local families in need. Since its founding, Computer Smiles has given away more than 50 computers.

Goldstein has been passionate about computers for nearly as long as the home computer has existed. He still owns his first computer, a Zenith 8088, which he bought in 1984. Goldstein describes how he had to learn how to code just to get the computer to work.

Goldstein said he has always enjoyed tinkering and immediately became fascinated with fixing computers and tinkering with them. He also became knowledgeable with HTML and used it to build an early website for his former business, Berlin Wallpaper.

“He always had a computer mind,” said Susan Goldstein, Marc’s wife. “He did the website. Everything (for their business) was on computers.”

About two and a half years ago, the Goldsteins retired after closing down their businesses. With more free time available, Marc continued to spend time working on computers when he and Susan read a story in The Cherry Hill Sun from 2017 about a nonprofit organization named BookSmiles. Formed by Cherry Hill resident Larry Abrams, BookSmiles collects books and gives them away to families in need in the area.

After reading the story, Marc met with Abrams to talk to him in greater detail about his organization. Marc learned there a lot of needy families who couldn't afford to buy a computer.

"Some of them were doing homework on their mother's phones," he said. "They were going to the library off hours or staying late hours at school."

After the meeting, Marc was inspired to form Computer Smiles. The name of the organization plays off of Abrams' BookSmiles organization.

Abrams also helped Marc get Computer Smiles off the ground in the school district he teaches in, Lindenwold. Marc estimates he was able to donate about 20 computers to families within the Lindenwold school system.

Marc receives computers from a variety of different places. In addition to receiving donations from local residents, Marc has established connections with local businesses, such as Flaster Greenberg law firm in Cherry Hill, which donated its old computers earlier this year when it was upgrading its system.

Marc accepts used but working laptops, desktops and other equipment such as monitors. When he receives a donation, he makes sure to wipe out any old personal data off the machine using a commercial wipe program.

"First thing I do when I get a computer is I pull the drive out, or if the computer is workable, I can run this program on it and wipe it clean in place," Marc said.

The newer the computer, the higher chance of it being able to still work. Marc said the best computers to donate are ones less than 10 years old. Computer Smiles is also in need of laptops with power cords, an item Marc has found hard to come by.

When Marc donates a computer to a family, he makes sure everything is set up and stays in contact with them. Computer Smiles guarantees families a computer through a child's academic career.

"I'll take care of the computers right through 12th grade graduation," Marc said. "If we have a fifth, sixth, seventh grader, we don't have to worry about that computer going bad. I'll replace everything for free."

Marc also encourages families without Internet at home to get in touch with EveryoneOn.org, a nonprofit organization providing low-cost Internet to low income families.

In addition to receiving help from Abrams, Marc has also teamed up with other nonprofits, including Women With Voice Charity, Collecting For A Cause and Camden County Pop Up Library. Marc said the advice and connections he's made with those organizations have helped him donate more computers and also receive 501c3 nonprofit organization status from the IRS.

Since forming his organization last year, Marc has donated nearly 60 computers to families in Lindenwold, Pine Hill, Camden and Philadelphia. Rooms in his home are filled with computers waiting to be fixed up. Marc said forming Computer Smiles has put him on a fulfilling journey he could have never imagined a couple years ago.

"It's opened my eyes with what's going on in the world with things that I didn't have a whole lot of exposure to," he said.

People can meet Marc and learn more about Computer Smiles at Congregation Beth El's Mitzvah Mall event on Sunday, Nov. 18 from 10:30 a.m. to noon. For more information about Computer Smiles, visit [www.computersmiles.org](http://www.computersmiles.org).