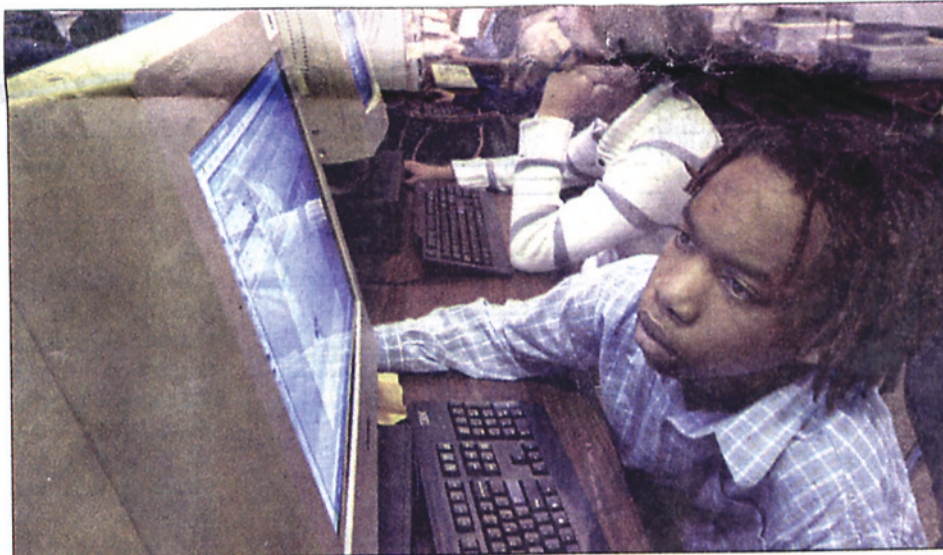


Disney students put mouse to work in \$250,000 animation lab



Nicholas Daniels stares intently as he works in the animation video lab at the Disney Magnet School, 4140 N. Marine Dr. (Photo by Joe Cyganowski/Staff Photographer)

BY SANDY THORN CLARK
Contributor

The mouse has new magic at Walt Disney Magnet School.

And the Lincoln View school's sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students are anxious to let their fingers do the walking and their imaginations do the soaring.

On Nov. 9, a \$250,000 animation lab was opened at the 11-acre school, 4140 N. Marine Drive, offering students training and instruction on high-end equipment and industry-standard software including Macromedia Flash MX 2004—equipment that offer students the chance to follow in the steps of legendary

animator Walt Disney, the Chicago-born creator of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck.

"At the core of this is getting students more interested in what they are learning by presenting it in a different way," says Dr. Barbara Eason-Watkins, Chicago Public Schools Chief Education Officer. Students already have used the software to animate blood flow through the heart after witnessing video of an open-heart surgery.

For students Nicholas Daniels, 13, and Dennis Briciu, 14, the 40 computer animation lab on the lower level of the school affords an opportunity to pursue their interests in art and

See DISNEY, Page 4

Disney

Continued from Page 1

animation twice a week while preparing for the future. Both say they look forward to the lab more than any other class.

"I'm sure it will help me in the future," says Briciu, barely removing his eyes from the colorful screen on which he's utilizing animation to show how cell phones work. His narrative is part of instructor Betty Piepho's project on animating how things work, based on information from howstuff-works.com. Others in the 26-member classroom are showing how cars work, how chocolate works, and how tattoos work.

"This is an extension of the natural talents Nicholas has," explains Piepho, an instructor for six years who has had to teach herself to stay ahead of the magnet school's advanced technology curve. "Nicholas is a natural artist - you should see the Martin Luther King he drew. Now he's using a mouse to enhance his skills."

"This is a great opportunity for our students who will be learning a true 21st century skill," states Arne Duncan, Chicago Public Schools chief executive officer. "This high-end computer lab is a testament to the will and ingenuity of the faculty of Disney Magnet School."

All of Disney's 1,600 students in pre-school through eighth grades will eventually be introduced to the lab that took three years to develop and is an example of the collaboration between communities and schools that Disney Principal Kathleen Hagstrom says is essential to improved education.

Donations for the lab came

from IBM, Square D Electric, The Walt and Lilly Disney Foundation, Siemens, Gibson Electric, Chicago Public Schools E-Rate Department, and the Field Foundation.

Though the school is named for Walt Disney, Hagstrom is quick to correct misconceptions that the school is funded by the Disney conglomerate. The school, which delivers arts- and technology-integrated instruction as part of the Fine Arts Magnet School Cluster, is part of the Chicago Public Schools, the nation's third-largest school system.

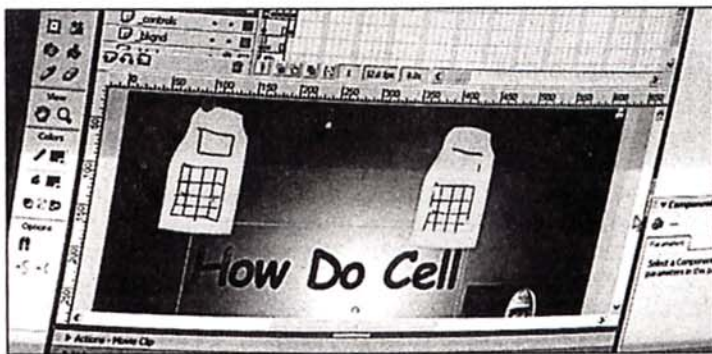
Hagstrom, principal at Disney for three years, initially asked Disney's daughter, Diane Disney Miller, to stop by the school for an impromptu visit as she made her way to O'Hare for a return flight home. "We were on our way to the airport when I asked if she would like to see our school and our after-school program. We stopped at the school, and as we - Diane and her husband, Ron, and I - headed to the after-school program, we could hear the kids singing the theme song from the Mickey Mouse Club! It was totally unplanned, but, I tell you, it had an impact," Hagstrom explains with a broad smile.

"I'll never forget what Diane Disney Miller said to me all those months ago. She said, 'I'm overwhelmed. My father would be proud of you.' That began a relationship that led to the generous donation for the animation lab from the Disney Foundation and brought her back for the ribbon-cutting ceremony," Hagstrom continues.

"This school is the way it is because it is just like the city of Chicago - it has those who are capable, those who are average, and



Dennis Briciu works with fellow student Hugo Villalobos in the new animation lab at Disney Magnet School. (Photos by Joe Cyganowski/Staff Photographer)



This computer screen shows a new animation program underway at the school.

those who are struggling," states the principal who bristles at those who believe the school overlooking Lake Michigan is of the rich and for the rich.

"Not so," she says emphatically, pushing her frosted mane of hair from her face. "It's all about applying and the luck of the draw. We bus kids in. Our student body represents 100 countries. Seventy-one percent are at the poverty level - and that will increase to 75 percent this next year. Forty percent are African American, 23 percent are Hispanic, 19 percent are white, 15 percent are Asian American ... others are American Indians and Pacific Islanders."

"I like to think big. I like vision. It's essential—how else will these kids have the opportunities to become competitive in their futures? We're all lucky to be here—I'm lucky, the 90 teachers are lucky, the 1,600 students are lucky," says Hagstrom, who says filming will be the next major arts expansion at Disney.

Technology Coordinator Brad Fisher, mindful of all of the ani-

mation lab's superb accommodations, marvels that all of the cabling has been integrated into the computer tables. "No cable to collect dust—no cable for kids to kick and inadvertently unplug. My vision and my goal from Day One was always 'the best.' When I see the kids working so intently, it gives me pause," Fisher comments.

"My job is to share that he be the best," says Hagstrom, who knows students by name and stops, seemingly unconsciously, to pick up pieces of abandoned wads of paper and to straighten furniture in the school lobby adorned with many Mickey and Minnie characters.

The music to the principal's ears comes in a rare form: When animation lab instructor Piepho tells her students it's time to go, there is a resounding chorus of "nooo."

"Put your mouse to work. Be sure you save your work so you have it to come back to next week," Piepho instructs.

At Disney; the mouse rules.



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