

Deer Park High School

A Cut Above The Rest



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It's after four o'clock. Classes are over at Deer Park. The school is silent and empty except for a handful of students busy in the lab. No, this is not detention – and it's not a science lab either. This is a video editing lab. Students are here on their own time adding last minute special effects and music to their projects with Matrox RT2000 video editing systems.

"Video Technology classes are completely full and have a waiting list," said Kari Rhame, technology director of Deer Park Independent School District. "Students are thrilled to be able to watch their favorite television programs and understand how certain effects are created. They can also reproduce some of these graphics and effects by themselves."

According to recent legislation passed by the Texas Education Association (TEA), all Texas high schools must offer at least four of seven technology application classes, one of which is Video Technology. The law was enacted in 1999; Texas school districts are still working to meet this legislation with hopes of adding a video technology class to their curriculum.

"The challenge for a lot of these schools is finding suitable equipment to teach the courses," said Kurt Brochhausen, vice president of sales at MicroSearch, a Matrox reseller in Texas. "Many schools who thought they had proper equipment are discovering their old mixer or camcorder is not up to par. Schools need state-of-the-art technology in the classes to prepare students for the real world."

Deer Park ahead of the game

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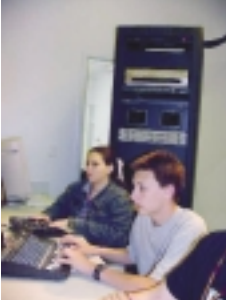
"We are currently offering three classes," said Rhame. "We would love to offer more, but cannot accommodate the demand due to limited teaching resources."

Marisa Marsico was chosen to develop the curriculum and teach Video Technology as she is the only qualified instructor at Deer Park High School. Marsico graduated with a B.F.A. degree in Radio, Television and Film from Sam Houston State University and currently teaches desktop publishing classes.

"After taking Video Technology and learning the wide range of skills and industry information that is covered in the class, any student who majors in radio, television or film at college will be at a great advantage compared to others," said Marsico. "We have far more equipment than most colleges in the Houston area, or even the US. I tell my students that based on the skills acquired here at Deer Park, they will be able earn money in college by serving as an intern at local TV stations."

"Before Deer Park purchased the RT2000 systems, the norm for schools was to have three or four workstations in a class with students rotating tasks," said Brochhausen. "They'd work for a week in the studio, a week in the field with a camera, and a week capturing and editing. This forced them to work on very short programs and limited their creative options as they had to share a system. Anything render intensive ate up too much time."

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"Deer Park has an excellent reputation for quality education," said Rhame. "We wanted to teach video production from A to Z. We wanted to teach students how to shoot, edit video, publish in different formats and provide a finished product for the customer. We spent a lot of time researching," said Rhame, who last year attended NAB - the largest annual technology tradeshow in the industry. "To allow students to fully experience every aspect of video production, we needed a system for each individual."

Choosing a system

Deer Park's biggest challenge in choosing a system was scheduling. The school does not offer block scheduling - 2.5 to 3 hour classes every other day, but rather offers every subject daily in 50-minute classes from bell to bell.

"With only 50 minutes a day, rendering takes on a whole new dynamic," said Rhame. You can't have a project that will take time to render if the student has only 30 minutes to work on it. They add a few effects and that's it; they must wait and see the results the next day. We needed a system to maximize on the short class time."

"We also wanted something Adobe-based as it is an industry standard," said Rhame. "We teach a lot of Adobe products - Photoshop, Illustrator and Pagemaker."

"Matrox was a natural fit. The RT2000 gave us an affordable, efficient, fast solution that met our software needs and allowed each student a personal workstation. If we had purchased a \$5,000 card, which turned into a \$15,000 workstation - that would use our entire budget - never mind purchasing cameras or completing the lab.

"With the RT2000, students can do all their cuts, dissolves and sophisticated graphics and 3D effects in real time, and see the finished project in the same session without rendering and having to come back the next day."

All hooked up together

Student workstations are hooked up to a dual LCD projector. By switching controls the instructor can take whatever is on one display and show it to the rest of the class on an 8' by 12' screen. The entire class can see what a classmate is doing right or wrong. The network also facilitates group projects. One person may be in charge of graphics, sound or video. Group resources can be shared across the network.

Student projects

Student projects include making videos of live events on campus and commercials. Topics are geared toward younger audiences, for example, anti-drug or anti-drinking messages, but also include public service, safety and community issues.

"The quantity and quality of equipment available to students at Deer Park is made possible by community funding. As a thank-you to the community, one class project is to create a video highlighting how technology is being used in all Deer Park schools and to show how the students will benefit," said Rhame.

Long term vision

Looking ahead, Rhame hopes to link all Deer Park district campuses together and do both live and tape-delayed programming. She is also in contact with the local cable provider to have a channel that highlights the work of Deer Park students and provides school district information to the community.

"The vision is that one day a community member can turn to the school district channel and see school programs. They can enjoy watching announcements, special programs and current events - that were created in part by the students," said Rhame. "This would strengthen the connection between the school district and community."

"Their goal is to give kids real world skills to walk out and be able to find work in a corporate media department, small production company or even start their own small production company. Thanks to the Matrox RT2000 labs, Deer Park students acquire the skills and tools they need to be able to do that," said Brochhausen.

Open house

On April 11th, Deer Park will host an open house featuring their new video production facilities. Technology directors and coordinators from all over Texas have been invited. Some will drive a long way to see Deer Park's impressive Matrox RT2000 video editing labs.