

"Sip 'n Swipe" teaches seniors to use iPads for email, photos, internet search

by Kathleen Harte Simone

"Congratulations! You can tap dance! Don't worry if it took you a few tries to tap your way to this page; soon you'll be tapping like Gene Kelly!"

This is one of the clever messages that seniors receive on their iPad screens during a session of Sip 'n Swipe, a Philadelphia-based computer literacy program designed specifically to help seniors use an iPad. Sessions are self-directed and are supported by coaches, not instructors.

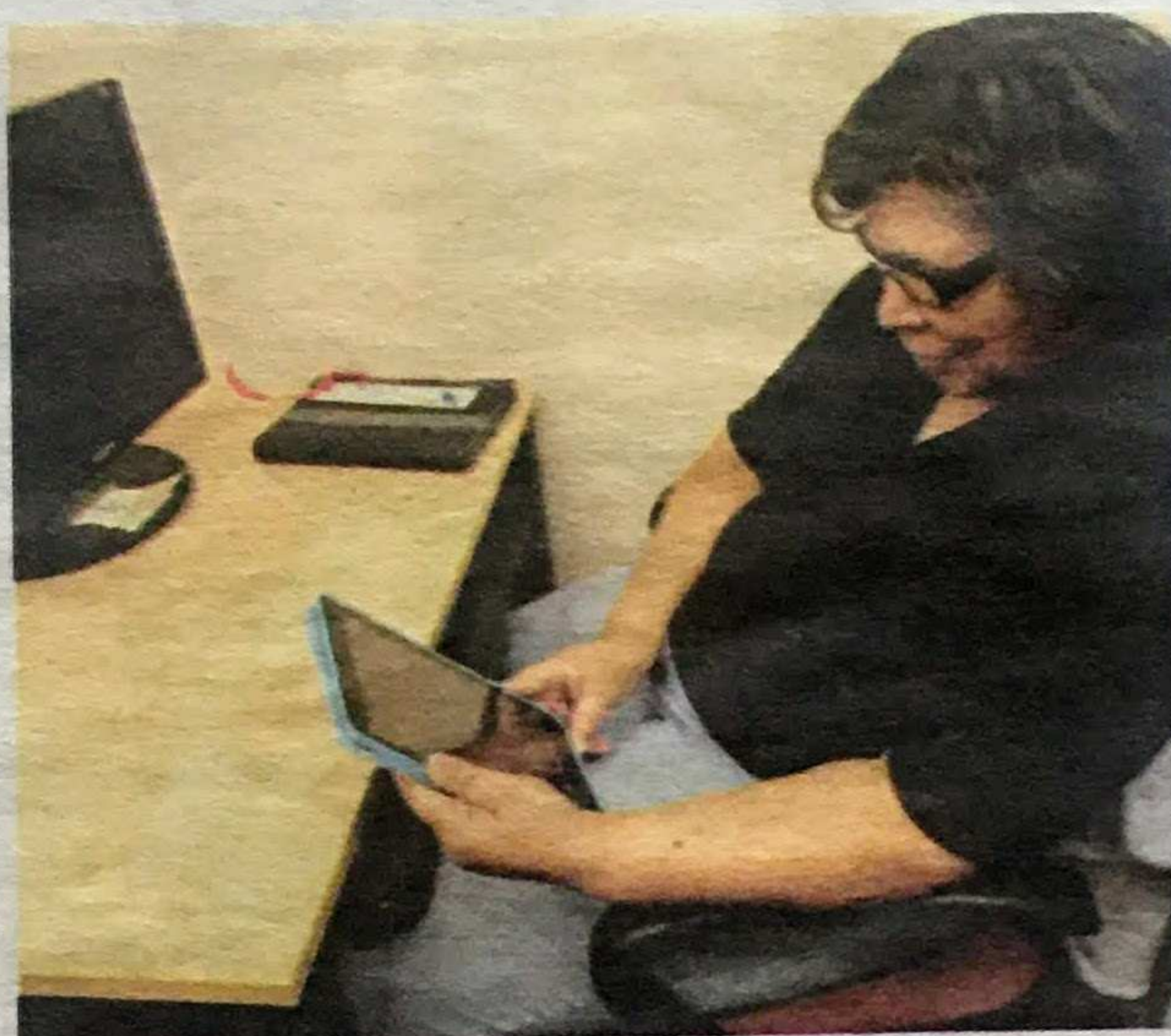
Participants at a recent Sip 'n Swipe at the Klein Jewish Community Center (JCC) in Northeast Philadelphia had different reasons for wanting to use an iPad.

"I want to be able to take pictures of my grandchildren in shows at school, and to be able to FaceTime (video chat) with my grandchildren who live out of state," George Goodman said.

"I'm mostly interested in getting on the Internet to find information on retirement homes and medical information," said Janice Janko.

Others were interested in the book-keeping function on the iPad; setting up an e-mail account to easily communicate with friends and family; and "just being able to connect with the world," said Myrna Izenberg.

Whatever the reasons, the participants were eager to embrace the new technology. The program was developed by Generations onLine (GoL), a nonprofit based in Philadelphia, whose focus is on enhancing communication among generations by promoting Internet access and literacy to elders. GoL has simplified the Internet for seniors by developing a software program that provides on-screen, step-by-step instruction to help people 65-plus use the Internet. Their newest program, Sip 'n Swipe, began at four Philadelphia senior centers: Philadelphia Senior Center – Main Branch, The Center at Journey's Way,



Charlotte Goins browses the internet on her iPad at West Philadelphia Senior Center, one of four centers that have offered members an iPad computer literacy program.

West Philadelphia Senior Community Center, and Klein JCC. There are plans to expand throughout the city, to neighboring counties, and eventually nationwide. In just a month, Sip 'n Swipe has helped more than 50 seniors attain proficiency on borrowed iPads, provided by Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA). Classes are set up in an open space, not a computer room, which fosters interest for those who pass by and as a result, most centers have waiting lists. PCA is working with all PCA-funded senior centers throughout the city to develop similar programming opportunities.

GoL began by offering classes in desktop computer Internet use, and classes continue in more than 1,800 facilities in 49 states and Canada; but recently, the focus has shifted to iPads. Tobey Dichter, founder and CEO of GoL, said that the format of iPads and other tablets has several advantages over the desktop computer, particularly for older adults. It is less complicated to learn, and is smaller and portable so it can be taken along with you, and repositioned easily to avoid glare. Additionally, there are

free Wi-Fi connections at libraries, many parks and local restaurants, potentially eliminating the necessity and cost of monthly internet service cost.

Sip 'n Swipe participants typically take three or four hour-long sessions to develop proficiency with the support of coaches. During a session, you're likely to hear participants comment, "Look at that, I did it!" or "How do I e-mail again?" In response, coaches may respond "I knew you

could. Keep telling yourself that you can't make a mistake; you can always go back and find what you're looking for." or "Well, how do you get to the homepage to access the e-mail?"

Lynn Israel was an employee of the Philadelphia School District for 36 years, nearly 25 of which were devoted to teaching computers. Today, Israel is a volunteer

coach for Sip 'n Swipe. "What is great about computers, as a learning tool, is the fact that students can work at their own pace," she said. "Those who need more time can move through the material at a slower pace and those that don't can speed along. Generations Online's software allows them to do just that."

Dichter was very much engaged with the participants at the JCC Sip 'n Swipe, but not willing to tell them exactly what to do. "The best advice is to trust yourself and your decades of wisdom. Know you won't ruin or break the tool in your quest to use it. New technologies do assume cumulative knowledge, but most try to be intuitive. So really search the device to see what the small symbols seem to indicate. Try them. Trust your own common sense. Don't rely on others until you are truly stuck. And you can always start over."

Her comments reinforced a quote from Thomas Edison that appears on the Sip 'n Swipe program: "Anything is easy – once you know how!"

Kathleen Harte Simone is a Philadelphia freelance writer.

Support groups

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Women's Support Group: Lutheran Settlement House, Mondays, 9 to 10 a.m.

CURRENT EVENTS

Having Our Say: Discuss news and Black history. Martin Luther King Older Adult Center, Tuesdays, 1:30 to 3 p.m.

Current Events: Discuss what's happening in the world and how you feel about it. West Philadelphia Senior Community Center, Fridays, 9:15 a.m.

Lifestyles: Reinvent yourself. Learn positive, inexpensive ways to redesign your home, clothing style, make-up, jewelry and more. Spring Garden Center, Thursdays, 10:30 a.m.

Unless indicated otherwise, the above activities are free.

See page 6 for locations and phone numbers of Philadelphia's senior centers. Contact your local senior center directly for more information.

You may also contact the PCA Helpline at 215-765-9040 and go to www.pcaCares.org.

Contact Alicia Colombo at:
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