

## **TEACHER LINKS STUDENTS WITH NEW TECHNOLOGY.(News)**

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**Daily News** Byline: Dominic Berbeo Staff Writer

**SAN FERNANDO** - Entering the old shop class-turned high-tech computer lab at San Fernando High School is like taking a step back into the future.

From the outside, the 1950s room is indistinguishable from the long row of auto and wood shops in this Northeast Valley public school of 4,600 students.

But inside, visionary teacher Marco Torres has created the silicon state's most advanced multimedia high school classroom, creating a futuristic lab to bring students and the community into the digital age.

Dubbed the Community Inspiration Studio, the lab was completed this week. A public open house is scheduled for today at 10 a.m.

Executives from the technology and entertainment industries have bombarded Torres with calls, interested in the high-tech preparation of his students.

Torres has been pushing and planning for the lab since 1998, when the school received a \$1.3 million grant to equip the campus with computer technology.

Over the past three years, hundreds of students and adults from the community have learned skills in makeshift space on the campus - ranging from Photoshop to using the Internet to creating digital, desk-top films.

"The trick is, we're not just teaching you spread sheets or programming," said Torres. "That's boring. We're teaching you how to create your own Web page or how to invest on the Web, and you learn the technical things on the way."

The experience has opened up new windows to this largely working-class Latino community, which lacks resources such as a large-scale bookstore because corporations have not historically been willing to invest in stores within the community.

Student response has been overwhelming.

"We're learning how to use images to express our thoughts instead of just words," said Christopher Rodriguez, a senior who helped Torres construct the lab. "This way people listen to you, even if they usually don't take teen-agers seriously."

That thinking process is exactly what Torres says he intended when he envisioned the lab.

"When people walk into the lab, 'Wow' is the first thing they're going to say," said Torres. "The next thing that will impress them is in how many ways these kids have grown to realize their potential."

Most of his students are bilingual and have gone on to major universities, Torres said, some with fully paid academic scholarships. Others have been snatched up by corporations such as Apple for high-paying projects while they go to college.

Freshman Elizabeth Rubalcaba, who was introduced to the Internet at the school, ended up teaching her parents how to use computers at the lab.

“A lot of students come here after school and even on the weekends,” she said. “It actually makes you want to go to school.”

Consuelo Molina, a senior, says what she's learned has made her decide to seek a career in film editing.

“We've made films and gone to speak at conventions about our work here,” said the articulate 18-year-old. “It's opened up new worlds for us.”

Torres started an annual film festival to display his students' work, some of which can be seen on the Web at [homepage.mac.com/sfett](http://homepage.mac.com/sfett).

The studio includes some 55 Macintosh G4 computers and workstations, laptops, a video conferencing room, a wireless network, a large-screen monitor, television production studio, and individual “think spaces.”

Torres plans to have the studio open after school during the week from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to noon for students and members of the community who want to learn computer skills.

In an area where about half the high school students drop out, residents and students say Torres and the studio are a godsend.

“It's inspirational,” said Jose Juarez, a senior who plans to go to college and major in multimedia and political science. “We would be at such a huge disadvantage without this.”

CAPTION(S):

photo

Photo:

(color) Christopher Rodriguez, 17, left, looks on as Jorge A. Zazueta, 18, works at the packed-with-computers Community Inspiration Studio at San Fernando High School.

Andy Holzman/Staff Photographer

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