

MITEL NETWORKS & NEWTOWN HIGH SCHOOL/HS 455

Background

Three years ago, Telecommunications Executive Jack Stoddard became Principal For a Day at Newtown High School, in Elmhurst, Queens. For Stoddard, the assignment was particularly exciting. He's "as New York as it gets"—a proud alumnus of the class of '69. Stoddard treasures his visits back to the historic school and the old neighborhood. Newtown principal John Ficalora—himself an alumnus, welcomed Stoddard back, and the two created a unique partnership between the 4500 students and Stoddard's Mitel Networks. It didn't end there.

The two became friends and compared notes on their different worlds. Stoddard admired Ficalora's dedication and his ability to manage his 400 employees. Ficalora found Stoddard determined to help the school improve its technology and admired his ability to connect with the students he met.

Projects

After discussing Newtown's objectives and challenges with Principal Ficalora, Jack Stoddard prioritized the need for a new technology lab. The computers, he noted, brought the kids together in a more effective way than traditional learning tools: they were interested and motivated to learn. Plus, real jobs would exist for those students who could be trained properly. Stoddard, then Vice President of Sales at Mitel Networks, decided to focus his efforts on providing technical expertise to the school and mentorship to students who might have an interest in pursuing technology related careers. Stoddard committed his company to building Newtown a technology lab. The idea was to provide technical expertise and provide equipment to train students to work in the telecommunications industry. Under Mitel's supervision, a sub-contractor installed highband cabling, racks, and servers. When completed, the lab would be a state-of-the-art resource. The school would be united by the broadband technology, and students would learn a real trade; how to use and maintain the infrastructure provided by the lab.



Mitel Networks hosted the first Technology Day at Newtown High School as part of Principal For A Day Jack Stoddard's partnership with the school.



Newtown High School Technology Class.

A natural outgrowth of this high-tech project was the schools' participation in an international robotics competition. Twenty students formed the "Technotics Team" to build a functioning robot. Stoddard made sure Mitel was one of Technotics' sponsors. He was impressed by the students' professionalism and teamwork—and the sense of camaraderie that pervaded the competition.

The relationship between Jack Stoddard and Newtown expanded into different areas. Stoddard provided financial support so that the school could buy a computer and software for the school newspaper. Newtown students were invited to visit the telecommunications company and several internships were made available to them. Principal Ficalora was invited to join Stoddard at the grand opening of his new offices. Stoddard helped Newtown celebrate the inauguration of the school's new baseball field by inviting dozens of students to be his guest at a Mets game; he provided the tickets and vouchers for refreshments.

Impact

On an average day at Newtown, 150 students pass through the new technology lab. According to Peter Paolino, the school's Assistant Principal in charge of technology, the students study network cable telecommunications, receive certification in computer repair, and participate in the ongoing robotics program. They work with the same equipment you'd find in a Con Ed control room. They are better prepared for high-paying jobs in the competitive telecommunications field because of Stoddard and Mitel's contributions.

The school newspaper has taken on new life. And the students are particularly proud of their robotics team.

But for Jack Stoddard, his ability to impact one life was particularly satisfying. This Newtown student was an intern at Mitel, but had not planned to attend college. His two-month internship changed all that and college became part of his future.

"Within two months we saw the student develop and mature mentally," says Assistant Principal Paolino. "What Jack did was amazing. He turned the kid's life around."

Stoddard calls it "the joy of taking some young lives and pointing them in the right direction."



From left: New York State Senator Joe Bruno, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Wesley Clover Networks Chairman Terry Matthews, and Mitel Networks CEO Donald Smith at the ribbon cutting for Wesley Clover's first NYC facility to support local businesses and community projects such as Mitel's partnership with Newtown High School.



Mets General Manager Omar Minaya and PFAD Jack Stoddard before an alumni baseball game to dedicate Newtown Field.

Communications and Moving Forward

Since his first year as PFAD, Jack Stoddard has been promoted to Vice President of worldwide sales for Encore Networks Inc, which is part of the Wesley Clover family of technology companies that includes Mitel. His new responsibilities include added travel, and he has asked another Mitel Executive, Eve Fox, to take over primary responsibility for the company's Principal For A Day partnership at Newtown. But that is just the beginning of what Stoddard calls "Phase Two" of his relationship with the school. He plans to recruit other Wesley Clover executives to step up and mentor Newtown's students. And he is looking into additional internships—even the possibility of international internship placements within his global company.

Ficalora's wish list includes more involvement from telecommunications industry representatives—role models who show the students they can succeed, given the right circumstances.

At Newtown High, where the motto is "we tower above the rest"—after the school's unique 169 foot tower—the Principal For A Day partnership has been a towering success. And it's just the beginning!