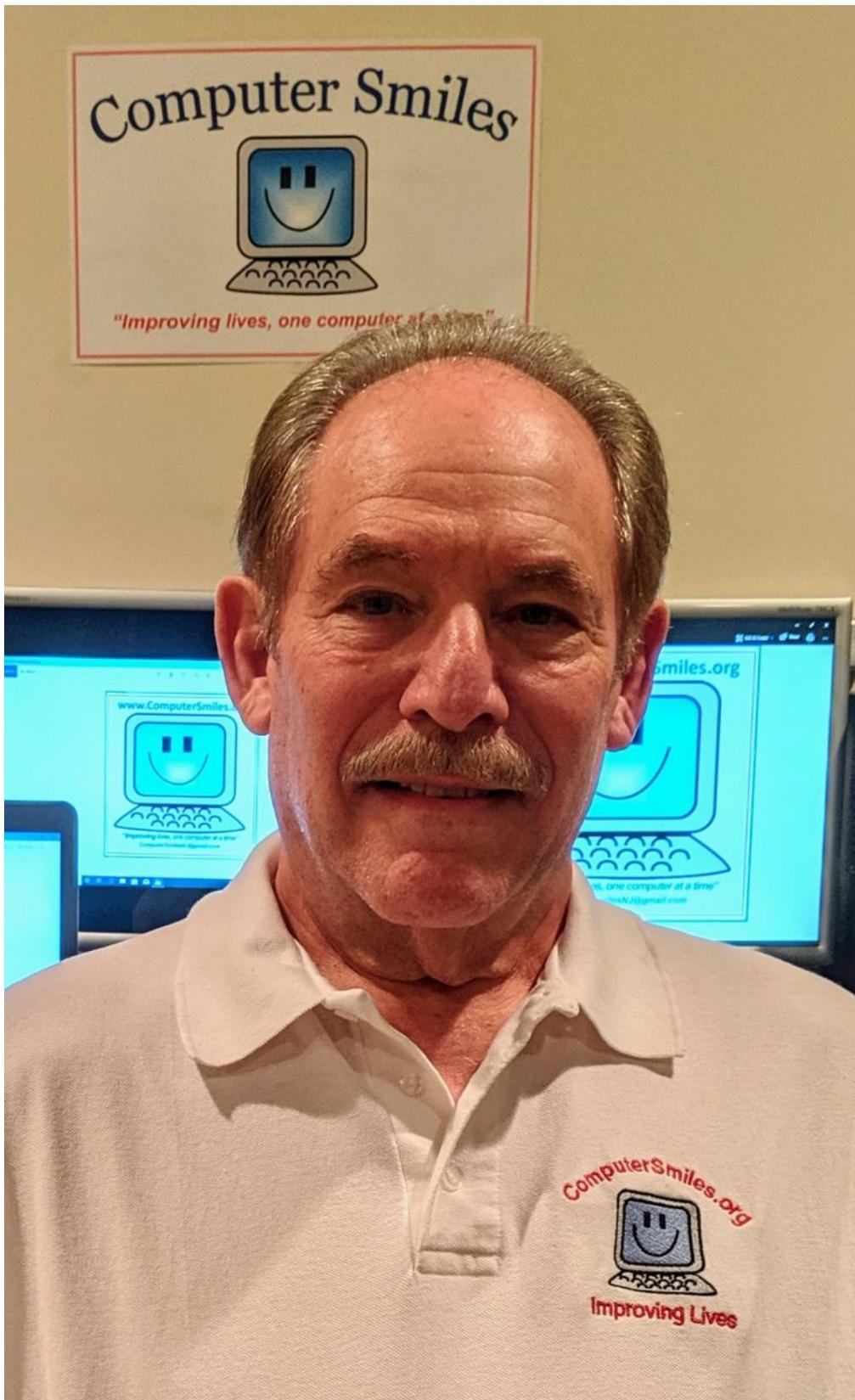# Goldstein named Camden County Freedom Medal recipient

'Computer Smiles' brings updated electronics to underserved populations.

By **BOB HERPEN** - January 24, 2020

Marc Goldstein, one of the twin Cherry Hill recipients of the Camden County Freedom Medal, rehabs and refurbishes computers and provides them to underserved populations throughout South Jersey.

A Cherry Hill resident for more than four decades, Camden County Freedom Medal winner Marc Goldstein made it clear that he's enjoying retirement, after spending years maintaining a retail business. But that doesn't mean he's content to sit and watch the world go by, or be passive when people are in need.

Goldstein rebuilds, refurbishes and reprograms donated computers and gives them to students, seniors and families who are in underserved communities and don't have access to the kind of technology most of us take for granted.

An inveterate tinkerer since his childhood in Northeast Philadelphia – where he assembled, disassembled and repaired everything from appliances and bikes to cars – Goldstein created the nonprofit venture Computer Smiles about three years ago. He still can't believe his good fortune.

"I got an email just before I went away, on Jan. 3, from the Camden County Freeholders, and it says 'you've been nominated for the award and the dinner' and the whole thing. I was literally shocked. There are so many people out there who do more special things," he said during a Jan. 21 conversation with the Sun.

Involved with computers since he purchased his first one in 1984, and constantly having to overhaul his technical acumen with each new model, Goldstein admits his biggest thrill is following the latest trends.

"It's the one thing that has kept my interest all these years, that technology has just gone so that there's always something new coming around the corner. When I get stuff here, I'm like a kid in a candy store," he said.

The leap from a series of props to occupy his time, to something that positively impacts the greater South Jersey community, arrived by accident. It also involves a name familiar to many.

"When we retired 3.5 years ago, I was just going to do repair work for people, just something to pass the time. I don't sit still very well. And then my wife sees an article in The Cherry Hill Sun about Larry Abrams and BookSmiles. She said 'you oughta read it,'" Goldstein revealed.

"I read the article, and I wrote to him and said, 'I'm about to work on some computers laying around, maybe I could do something other than what I'm doing, give them to people who might need them.' By the next afternoon we met for lunch."

Abrams, who Goldstein credits as "the driving force behind me" in his computer adventures, led him to the next step.

"He says, 'I've got students in our classrooms (in Lindenwold) and they get good grades but they don't have the tools to work with,' and he wondered if there was a way to get a computer into their houses. So, we talked to counselors, parents and found out they had cable service but no internet," he continued.

The pair eventually found an organization that would install internet capability into a home for $10 a month if the job was through a school lunch program.

"I had 10 computers from Curtis Publishing in Pennsauken, and Larry said 'I'll get 10 students, we'll have an essay contest,' which he did, and the 10 best essays were going to get the computers. And his kids were the first ones to get them," Goldstein said.

"I went to the first kid's house, and there was nothing in the apartment. It was just a desktop at that time, and a monitor. The kid was thrilled, the parents were thrilled. It just really had an impact on us. It was our first look inside how somebody else lives. My wife and I walked out of there … something just gets ya."

With some continued friendly persuasion from Abrams – and in spite of the resulting paperwork headaches – Goldstein slowly began to put the pieces together to build ComputerSmiles into the nonprofit which has gained a regional reputation.

"That has opened up tons of doors for me. I've had a lot of access to companies that wouldn't normally talk to me, and I think that's what's driven the interviews and the newspapers and hearing from Senator Beach. It's coming out of nowhere. Each time something happens, I'm floored," he admitted.

On the morning before the interview, Goldstein dropped off 14 freshly rehabbed laptops to an elementary school in Camden. To date, ComputerSmiles has donated 260 units to those in need of a technological boost. His goal is to get 1,000 computers into the hands of people who really need them.

For more information about Goldstein's mission, visit www.computersmiles.org/.

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