

## HEY, OLD DOGS...DON'T BE AFRAID

By Fred Hobbs

So the saying goes, "You can't teach old dogs new tricks." That ancient chestnut has been resurrected by some technological smart alecks who claim that most seniors can't learn to use a computer.

Casting aside that broad-brush declaration from the "uber techies", the truth is that many of us who didn't grow up online are uncomfortable or even downright frightened to learn to use this most useful tool.

Growing up in the age of Remington, Underwood and Burroughs, I confess to having such fears until the last couple of years before my retirement. My business associate and I ran a public relations firm; consistently good, fast and accurate communication was essential. We were fortunate to have on our staff a young entry-level employee, Kristin, who served as a wonderful tutor, easing our misgivings and guiding us down the path toward at least basic computer knowledge.

The word processing function was easy to grasp. We simply were using a "super typewriter" that miraculously allowed us to type each word perfectly without printing parts of some letters above the line. No messy ribbons to change. No "white out" needed to correct errors. Single words, whole paragraphs or even entire sections could be erased, moved or re-written. Then, the entire document could be sent to the printer and retrieved in a matter of minutes. And it could be stored for possible future use.

E-mail was trickier and more mysterious. How could these messages be sent and received? And, why did we need to be so fussy on the exact way e-mail addresses were typed-out? Kristin patiently worked us through the process. Ours being a "words" operation and not a "numbers" game, we didn't perform very many actual calculator functions. We left those tasks to our accountant.

Although dozens of other helpful applications are available (think "Google", scanning, photo transmissions, etc.), wary seniors should know that just learning the basic word processing and e-mail functions would provide a whole new dimension to the tasks of communicating.

While this embrace of new technology helped me in the workplace, some of my contemporaries, including certain family members and good friends are still reluctant to follow my example. My friend Robert, for instance, steadfastly refuses to consider use of a computer. Yet he hungers for information on a number of topics and eagerly devours print-outs of various articles and opinion pieces I find online and share with him.

Bill, my older brother is alternately reluctant and curious about plunging deeper into computer waters. My nephew and his wife recently gave him a tablet device, the use of which he is cautiously considering. My next door neighbor has an vintage IBM Selectric typewriter. Only a few merchants still sell ribbons for them. All of these seniors could benefit by using or extending their use of a computer.

So, don't be afraid. If this old dog can learn a few tricks at the keyboard and with the mouse, you can, too!