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UNC Employee Forum, Dell offer computer package

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UNC's Employee Forum

CHAPEL HILL -- With two children in college, money's tight around the Griffin household these days.

That's why the 5-year-old computer hadn't been upgraded -- until now.

Tommy Griffin, chairman of UNC's Employee Forum, recently bought his family a new Dell desktop computer, taking advantage of a new university program offering a basic, workable system for under \$500.

"I couldn't afford it until it got down to this price," said Griffin, who repairs heating and air conditioning systems at UNC. "You got two kids in college, you ain't got much money around."

The new program came from the forum's desire to create a more computer-literate work force on the UNC campus. Employees spoke often of the desire to learn and use computers, but couldn't afford to spend \$1,000 or more on an elaborate system, Griffin said.

The new program is accessible through the Employee Forum Web site, but is actually available to anyone in North Carolina with a link to a university or community college, public or private, said Ernie Patterson, who coordinated the program.

"It's very flexible," said Patterson, the network manager for UNC's biology department. "If a university has an outreach program in your high school, you can buy it. If your kids go to a university in North Carolina, you can buy it."

In one two-week period soon after the program began, more than 60 people bought computers, Griffin said.

The program offers up a very basic Dell desktop system that, with tax and shipping included, comes at just under \$500. It includes a Dell Dimension 2400 computer, a 2.4 GHz processor, a 40 gigabyte hard drive, 128 megabytes of memory, a 17-inch monitor, a CD-ROM, a floppy disk drive, a printer and the Windows XP Home operating system. Buyers can pay extra to upgrade memory, processing speed and monitor size and quality.

"It's a starter system," Patterson said. "This will take care of the majority of people. If you're really into video editing, you shouldn't be buying this anyway, but if you're surfing the Internet and doing some word processing, this will work fine."

The university asked three vendors to put together computer packages for \$500 or less, and only Dell responded, Patterson said. Dell has a number of computer packages available on its Web site, and some are priced at \$500 or less.

But in most cases, those advertised prices don't take into account shipping, taxes or printers. The printer offered in the UNC deal is an extra \$89 on most deals available on the Dell site.

"We've not found better deals at any of the Dell sites we've looked at," Patterson said. "If you do the same configuration, this is [generally] \$100 to \$150 less."

Dell also offers a laptop option for \$875.

