

Award-winning program

AIL uses multimedia to kick the habit

by AMY SMITH
Austin Business Journal Writer

First, there was multimedia. Then there was multimedia with a conscience.

The Austin-based American Institute for Learning (AIL) is being credited for bringing social awareness to the high-tech world with two computer-based, laserdisc, multimedia programs on substance abuse.

For its efforts, AIL's research and development group won top honors last month during the spring Comdex computer show in Atlanta, the second largest annual computer event in the country.

The two programs, "Addiction and Its Processes" and "Life Moves: The Process of Recovery," won five major awards, including Best of Show, two Awards of Excellence and two gold medals in the education category.

The annual competition attracted more than 600 entries from national giants such as Columbia TriStar and Sega.

The two educational programs, developed under the leadership of Dewey Winburne, manager of AIL's

research and development division, will be used in schools and drug rehabilita-

tion treatment centers throughout Texas.



Traveling to the Comdex computer show in Atlanta last month to accept top awards for two multimedia projects were Richard Halpin, founder and chief executive of the American Institute for Learning (AIL); Dewey Winburne, AIL director of research and development; and Joe Jerkins, chairman of the AIL board.

Unique programs

What sets AIL's award-winning multimedia programs apart from others is that the three-year project, funded by the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, included the work of high school-age participants, some of them former substance abusers, said Richard Halpin, founder and chief executive officer of the alternative learning center for high school dropouts and unskilled adults.

"This was a true community effort," said Winburne, citing the in-kind contributions of Minnesota Mining & Manufacturing Co.; Austin-based Metropost, which provided post-production editing; Jawai Interactive; Dell Computer Corp.; IBM Corp.; Apple Computer Corp.; the RGK Foundation; and the Seth Kahn Foundation.

The project also received funding from the office of Gov. Ann Richards. The Texas Learning Technologies Group served as the principal subcontractor and consultant for the "Life Moves"

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multimedia program, Winburne added.

In all, about six AIL staff members and a dozen students were the core of participation in the project.

Winburne said he had no intention of entering the multimedia programs in the Comdex competition until some associates convinced him that the project was a winner.

Overcome with joy

"I was literally speechless," recalled Winburne of the black-tie awards ceremony. "There we were among all those industry leaders."

The two multimedia titles are designed for young viewers and include the work of young adults both in front of and behind the cameras.

The multimedia program is just one aspect of AIL's contributions to Austin, said Chip Wolfe, chief executive officer of Sterling Information Group Inc. and an AIL board member.

"AIL is the best-kept secret in Austin," Wolfe said. "It's utterly amazing to me that these kids, whom many might consider throw-away kids, beat the pants off of the commercial companies nationwide at Comdex."

Joe Jerkins, chairman of AIL's executive committee, praised AIL's work on the project.

"I felt very proud to be at Comdex," said Jerkins, a former chairman of the Greater Austin

Chamber of Commerce. "People at the show kept talking about Austin and all the work that's being done in the area of multimedia."

Jerkins also praised AIL's overall contributions in helping teen-agers and adults move off the welfare rolls to become self-sufficient.

"We need educated people to be good employees and that's what AIL tries to do," Jerkins said. "The kids also are able to obtain entrepreneurial skills and training, whether they decide to go into business for themselves or not."

One entrepreneurial offshoot of AIL is the Sublime Notions gift shop which opened last year at 101 W. Fifth St. When students aren't working at the shop, they're taking business

education classes taught by Lee Ramos, a former general manager of an investment banking firm.

One store operator, 18-year-old John Muir, said he has learned plenty about the business world since he started working at the shop December.

Muir, who dropped out of high school in the 11th grade, said he didn't see

much of a future ahead for him until joining the store staff.

"I've learned to count down the time to see how much profit we've made the end of the day and I've learned how to work out deals to get merchants to sell things here on consignment," Muir said. **AMJ**

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