

Rye Brook teen, father start computer charity

Some college-bound scholars in need to receive laptops

Karina Stridh

The Journal News

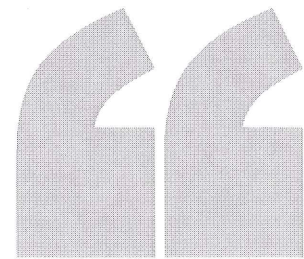
RYE BROOK - Two years ago, Rye Brook student Alex Drechsler celebrated his bar mitzvah with an unusual way of giving back to the community: giving five high-achieving, low-income seniors at nearby Port Chester High School new laptops and printers.

"I never knew anyone who started a charity, so it was kind of a mystery," said Alex, now a freshman at Blind Brook High School. "But once we presented the award and saw these students and their parents' reactions - they were so excited - it was just a great feeling."

The scholarship "was originally going to be a one-time thing, but then we got into it, and we saw how appreciative (Port Chester High School) was. So we decided to continue the program, making it an annual event and eventually expanding it," said his father, Robert Drechsler.

This year, in addition to Port Chester, Yonkers High School and New Rochelle High School will each award five deserving seniors with a laptop and a "3-in-1" printer, scanner and copier, thanks to the Drechslers' charity, To the Top with Laptops.

The laptop giveaway was Robert Drechsler's idea, his son said.



I cannot thank them enough. The excitement it has brought to the school's community, words cannot express. Having a laptop means so much to the students.

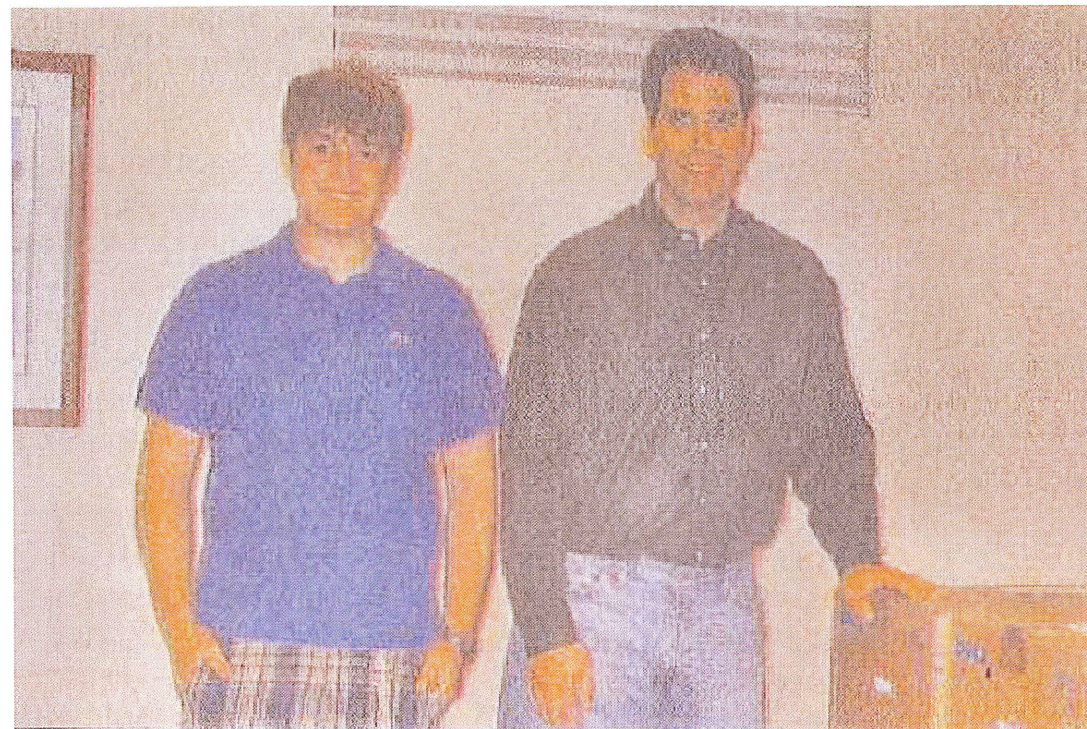
Andrea Davis program Official at Port Chester High School

"(My father) realized how important it was to have a laptop because my cousin was just going off to college. Laptops are so important nowadays, with the Internet and e-mail, and without it college would be more difficult," said the teenager.

Robert Drechsler said his son also benefits.

"When (Alex) sees how excited and appreciative the recipients are it makes him appreciate his opportunities more," he said.

"I think it's partially our responsibility (to help)," Alex Drechsler said.



Alex Drechsler, left, and his father, Robert, stand behind boxes of laptops and printers. These electronics will be distributed to 15 college-bound seniors from Port Chester High School, Yonkers High School and New Rochelle High School as part of the Drechsler's To the Top with Laptops scholarship program.

Courtesy of Alex and Robert Drechsler

"You can say I'm fortunate -- I don't have to worry about getting the funds for a laptop in college, because of my parents, so I have the responsibility to help others obtain the benefit of a laptop.

"It shows them that all their hard work was not for nothing, that all their work is for something better, and that they should continue to work hard because something will come out of it."

The schools choose the recipients based on academic performance, service to the school and community, character, integrity and financial need. This year's Port Chester recipients will be announced tonight. New Rochelle's will be announced June 16 and Yonkers High School recipients will be announced June 18.

The Drechslers hope to add Mamaroneck High School to the list next year.

Andrea Davis, a guidance counselor and the chairwoman of the Senior Scholarships Awards Program at Port Chester High School, said.

"I cannot thank them enough. The excitement it has brought to the school's community, words cannot express. Having a laptop means so much to the students, because it's something they can use for years and years to come," Davis added.

Kevin Joseph, currently a pharmacy major at Long Island University, received one of the Drechslers' laptops last year.

"I live in dorms, so I'm using my laptop and printer for all my work," he said.

"There are so many people who can't afford laptops, so (the Drechslers) are doing a great thing."

Initially, the program was funded partly by Robert Drechsler and partly by Alex's bar mitzvah money. Since then, it has garnered the support of various organizations, companies, and philanthropists.

At a recent fundraiser at the Bonnie Briar Country Club, sponsors, including Verizon, the Hudson Valley National Foundation and the Robert W. Johnson IV

Charitable Trust, made donations that ranged from \$500 to \$5,000.

At that same fundraiser, Alex premiered a self-made documentary that included interviews with past recipients and school officials involved in the program.

"It makes it more real when you see these students who have come so far, with their stories and their struggles all through life, and (a laptop) is just one less thing for them to think about," he said.

