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PS 7 Will Get Some Laptops

Donor offers to replace stolen computer gear

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PS 7, the victim of a \$100,000 heist, received some good news last week when a non-profit organization announced it would begin to replace the school's stolen technology.

Per Scholas, a Bronx-based group that brings technology to low-income families, told Principal Renee Cloutier it will bring 30 laptops to the school this week and reach out to businesses to acquire the rest.

Ms. Cloutier and her colleagues were in the school on Aug. 30 and locked the building when they left. Upon returning the next morning, they discovered 81 laptop computers, two desktop computers, five printers and two projectors were stolen from classrooms and the library.

"We determined it happened the night of Aug. 30," Ms. Cloutier said.

A police source said the school's alarm did not go off during the burglary. Ms. Cloutier said it was "disheartening" to discover the theft.

"I remember walking out of school and the students were asking, 'Is it true Ms. Cloutier? Did they take our computers?' Someone has stolen from children. They've taken from our children and that's the hardest part," she said.

Ms. Cloutier said she and her staff are "moving forward" from the event and happy to find a silver lining in the cloud. Per Scholas met with the principal last week and promised the replacement of the lost computers.

"I can't believe this, you just made my day," said school librarian Tara McMaster, when she heard the news.

Councilman Oliver Koppell had secured \$81,000 to fund a new computer lab for PS 7 in fiscal year 2007. Luckily, none of the new lab computers were stolen and a grand

opening of the new facility will take place Tuesday, Oct. 2, at 9 a.m.

An after-school film club at the school is planning to use the equipment to produce a film called Kingsbridge: Then and Now.

Mr. Koppell had hoped he could somehow replace the computers, but his discretionary funds were already committed. So Per Scholas, which partners with Mr. Koppell in his computer-recycling program, offered to help.

While pleased with the organization's initial grant, Mr. Koppell wants to see all the stolen equipment replaced.

"We are going to do better than 30 computers," he said. "We are looking into the possibility of getting funding from the city, but the budget is already nailed down."

A librarian at the school for 15 years, Ms. McMaster said the computers are crucial when teaching children how to research.

She estimates PS 7 still has about 70 laptops for the children to use, but it's still feeling the effects of the lost technology.

"We use those computers every day," she said. "It's just wonderful they will be replaced. I'm so excited."

While she has "no clue" as to who stole the technology, the laptops "are heavy, let me tell you that," she said. "Imagine lifting 16 laptops on a steel cart."

Police found no signs of forced entry and believe the theft could have been an inside job. They are still investigating.

Asked whether she had any suspicion as to what happened that night, Ms. Cloutier responded, "I can't speak to that. It's not fair for me to say."

She later added: "We have been working closely with detectives from 50th Precinct. All protocols have been followed. We have dotted every i and crossed every t."