

Growing firm born in Livonia basement

BY RICHARD PEARL
SPECIAL WRITER

If the mere thought of running that powerful new personal computer – at home or at the office – has you stressed out, a new business service started in a Livonia basement may have the answer.

In keeping with their motto, "Unleash the power of your PC with your mind," business partners and computer mavens Jeff Underwood, a native of Livonia, and Dave Barman have opened what is believed to be the Canton-Plymouth area's first computer training center.

Since January, U&B Consulting, Computers and Training Center, a six-year-old firm at a strip mall at Lilley and Warren Roads, has been offering one-day, six-hour beginner or advanced sessions in IBM and IBM-compatible computer training.

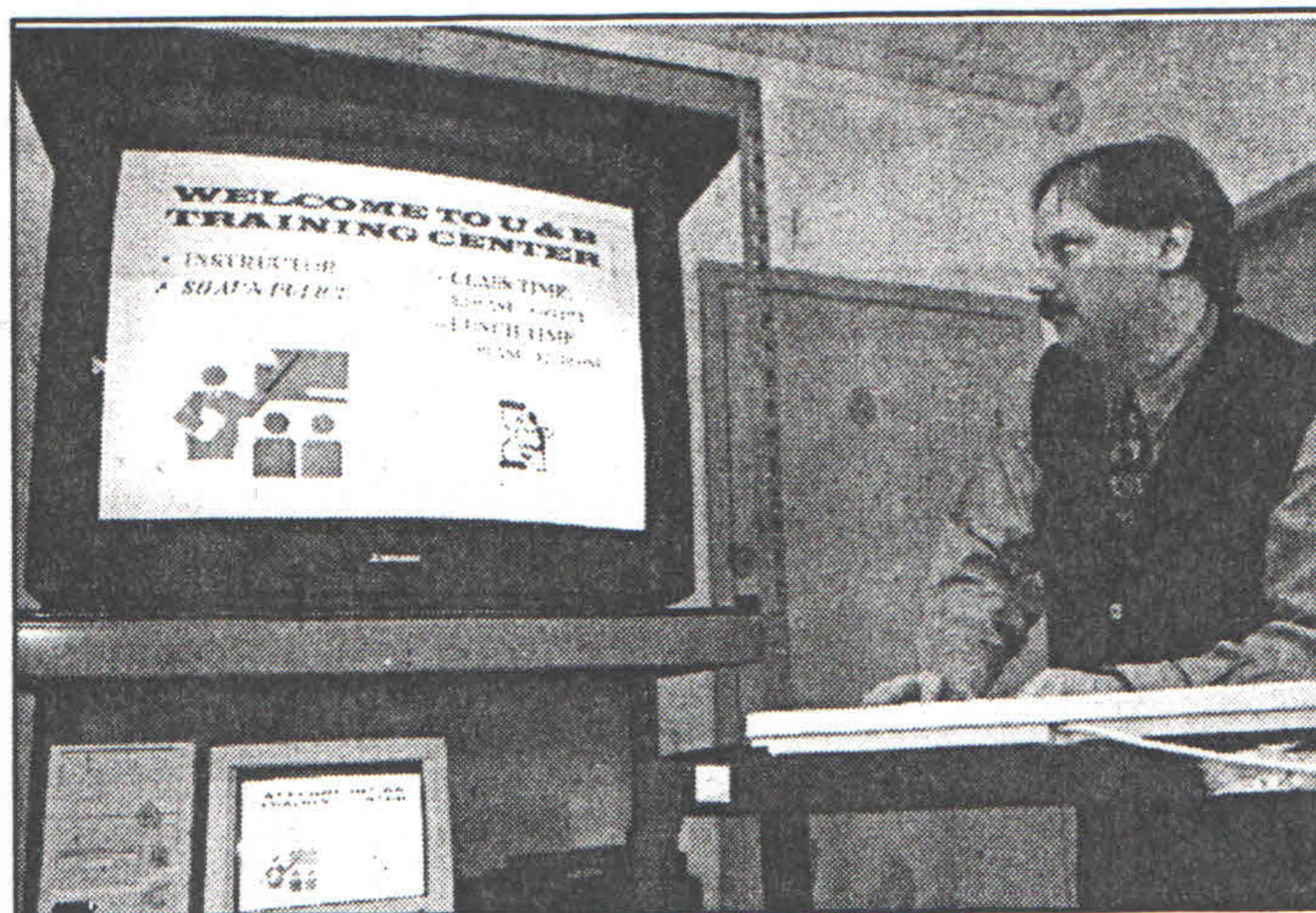
Classes in either Windows '95 or Microsoft's Word, Excel or Access are conducted by one of the company's four professional teachers in the firm's new state-of-the-art classroom.

Featured are 15 fast, U&B custom-built 133-Megahertz networked Pentium computers and a 40-inch television monitor, upon which the instructor can both show an instructional video and instantly display any student's monitor, to facilitate answering questions and solving problems. A Microsoft textbook is included in the training materials.

The fees are \$95 per person for beginning or advanced Windows '95 and \$125 per person for each of the other classes.

Or, if you want to do your own instructing, you can rent the facility for \$500 per day.

"Just six hours, one day –



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRESLER

Trainer: *Jeff Underwood, a native of Livonia, is a partner in U&B Consulting, Computers and Training Center, a six-year-old firm which has been offering one-day, six-hour beginner or advanced sessions in IBM and IBM-compatible computer training.*

that's it," says Underwood of U&B's classes, explaining that the training center was created because in most cases, "users aren't able to get the full potential from their units."

"You can have the fanciest computer in the world," says Underwood, "but if you don't know how to use it, it doesn't do you much good."

"Sure, a lot of people can learn computers from a book, but classes accelerate it considerably."

U&B began six years ago as a computer service operating out of Underwood's bedroom in his parents' house in Livonia. He'd bought a computer but was having trouble with the display on the monitor, so the supplier sent over a young computer wiz named Dave Barman. He quick-

ly fixed the display and the two became friends and then business partners.

"He's a technical guru and he's amazing," says Underwood of Barman, who has a degree in electrical engineering and handles the hardware and software. Underwood, who runs the business operations – "I'm better at keeping track of things and keeping people happy" – became so fascinated with computers that he switched his major from business to computer sciences.

The business soon outgrew Underwood's old bedroom and the fledgling company was moved to an apartment in Canton. About four years ago, it came to the strip mall. Since then, its growth has required more space and often 12 to 14-hour workdays, sometimes seven

days a week.

Underwood's parents, Dean and Sandra of Livonia, recently joined the two co-founders as partners in the training center and Sandra works full-time with Jeff to help handle the paperwork.

Both Underwood, 33, and Barman, 27, now live in Canton.

Their company, which builds and installs PCs for home and business and also installs network systems in businesses.

Customer Deborah Collins, an assistant manager of an apartment complex, praised U&B's work. "You get right to whom you want to speak to and don't get blown off. I've never had to wait for anything with them."

The company is expanding its retail department to carry more hardware and software and it plans to offer Internet training by May.

Of the phenomenal growth of computers, Underwood can only say, "I don't know how we ever functioned without computers." His home PC is hooked into a big 55-inch projection television for computer games and is also connected by modem to the office, allowing him more time with wife Sharon and infant son Dean.

And Underwood's computer? It's actually the same one he's had for eight years – a 286 that he's upgraded to a high-powered Pentium with 32 megs of RAM. "If you upgrade on a two-year basis, you can keep your PC current."