Trainers in demand

By Tara Marion

In most places of business, computers are standard.

Bank tellers use them to access account information, mechanics use them to assess vehicles, health care providers schedule appointments on them, and cashiers use them at the point of sales. No matter what people do or where they work, there's a good chance that they will need to know how to operate a computer.

Computer trainers such as **Computer Assistant** in St. Joseph and **Askler, Fitch and Associates** in Augusta offer hands-on, personalized instruction for most major business applications. Microsoft-based applications such as Word, Excel, Access, PowerPoint and Outlook are the most popular, the owners of these companies said.

Trainers as Computer Assistant spend a lot of time devising sessions that give students as much knowledge as possible. Part of the strategy is to stagger sessions.

"We offer classes in kind of a mixed up way," Computer Assistant owner, Tom Martinez said. "We designed it so you couldn't take Word level one, Word level two and Word level three in the same month. Someone can't come in and rip through all the classes because we don't think they're going to learn."

Excel 2000 training at Askler, Fitch, for example, is divided into three levels, with each course lasting one day. On one day, students can learn basic skills, with content growing more advanced each day. Classes range from $125 to $170 per day, owner Kathy Askler said.

They are about $99 per day at Computer Assistant.

Computer assistant also encourages students to start at the beginning.

"One of the things we get when people sign up for training is the reluctance to take the level-one course," Martinez said. "They might think it's beneath them."

Employers sometimes send employees to Askler's facility simply for less distraction.

"Meaning, if I know you're in the training room next door, and I want to grab you, well, maybe I'll just do that, versus if you're here, I'm not able to do that," she said.

Askler, Fitch has performed computer training with a variety of industries. Clients include Denso Manufacturing Michigan, Inc. in Battle Creek, Eaton Corp. in Oshtemo, Bronson Hospital in Kalamazoo and Stryker Corp. in Portage.

"That's why we chose Augusta," Askler said. "It's in the middle of our client base, but our instructors will go anywhere."