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For the Times Herald-Record

October 05. 2015 9:32PM

Pike library to lend air-pollution monitors

MILFORD, Pa. - Pike County residents will soon be able to go to their public library and borrow a device that will tell them what's in the air they breathe.

At Carnegie Mellon University's Robotics Institute in Pittsburgh, Illah Nourbakhsh, professor of robotics, and Mary Beatrice Dias, project director, have been inventing technology that allows people to follow changes in their environment and address them.

Aided by grants from the Heinz and Fine foundations, they invented the Speck monitor, a device the size of a small clock, to enable people to monitor toxic particulate matter at home.

"We wanted to allow people to own the data and decide what to do," Dias said. "With air monitoring, an agency usually owns the data and makes decisions."

The monitor collects data that can be uploaded to the Web and shared. To facilitate community access and collaboration, they created a pilot public library program in Pittsburgh, donating several Speck monitors to be loaned like books.

Rose Chiocchi, Pike County Public Library director, holds the library's new loan item, a Speck Monitor, that allows people to keep track of air pollution at home. JESSICA COHEN/FOR THE TIMES HERALD-RECORD

"It's become a popular program that got people involved in community advocacy," Dias said.

As a result, Nourbakhsh and Dias decided to launch Speck monitor library programs nationally.

On Saturday, the Pike County Public Library becomes the first location in that effort, beginning with a presentation on the Speck monitors at 1 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 10, at the Patisserie, 403 Broad St., Milford, Pa.

The Robotics Institute donated five Speck monitors to the Pike County Public Library, and those will be available to borrow.

For more information about the meeting, email asatess@pa.net. For more information about Speck monitors, go to www.specksensor.com.

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