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Video conferencing expands realty class

Students and teachers can talk to each other across the miles, saving money and time.

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It's the way of not only the future, but of the now.

Technology has allowed at least one real estate company the opportunity to expand its student base in offering classes on video conferencing, a move that makes things more convenient to students and teachers alike.

Cooke Real Estate School owner Frank Cooke started offering video conferencing classes in 1999 and has taught nearly 5,000 students so far. The company in St. Petersburg is expanding and is offering classes in Tavares.

Teachers are brought together with students via video conferencing. Students can also watch the live class over the Internet.

"Video conferencing is the best technology for providing courses in the local community. Students like it because they don't have to travel so far," Cooke said.

Licensed Realtor Gary Renfro was the first to go through the classes at Century 21, 102 W. Burleigh Blvd., Tavares. He was the only student at the site taking the weeklong salesperson course. Classes there have grown to include about six stu-

dents.

"The biggest benefit is you don't have to pay for a hotel room, or drive to Orlando every day," Renfro said.

"The technology allows you to interact with the instructor. Any time I spoke, she responded to me like I was sitting right there with her. I would recommend it to anybody. It's as good as sitting in a classroom."

"The course gave you the material. If you applied yourself, you could pass the state exam," Renfro said.

Cooke said because video conferencing is like being physically present with students, it enables teachers to monitor classroom quality.

"It's two-way video. We can see the students. We have better control over classroom quality. We can verify class attendance because we can see them," he said.

To practice real estate in the state of Florida, licensing courses are required and students must pass a test.

"We usually have 30 or 40 students a week going through a course, scattered in various locations across the state," Cooke said. "There might be only one or two students at a class site."

Century 21 broker owner Peter Pendergast works with Cooke. Pendergast provides the location, while Cooke provides the equipment, along with the instruction.

For information, call 1-800-943-9993.