

By: July 2007 Pancescu, Hardware Editor

Intel Makes New Friends

The "One Laptop Per Child" and Intel put their differences behind them

Nicholas Negroponte's "One Laptop Per Child" program is bringing Intel on board as a possible future hardware supplier and partner. Intel will become the 11th member of the board, joining the already present Google, eBay, Nortel, RedHat and Advanced Micro Devices. The foundation which runs the OLPC program plans to sell ultra low cost laptops to government agencies around the world, so the laptops could be used by children in elementary schools at no cost. Until now, Intel's chairman, Craig Barrett, had derided Negroponte's machines as mere gadgets, while Intel was signing up international governments for its own "Classmate" PCs, which follow more conventional computing designs than One Laptop Per Child's radically rethought "XO" computers. Negroponte was suspicious of Intel's motives, since the XO runs on processors from Intel's fiercest rival, Advanced Micro Devices Inc. Intel had hurt his mission and "should be ashamed of itself", he added. But in recent weeks, Negroponte and Intel CEO Paul Otellini began peace talks, culminating in a face-to-face meeting on Thursday at Intel headquarters in Santa Clara, Calif. And on Friday, the two sides said they had joined forces: Intel will join One Laptop Per Child's board and contribute money and technical expertise to the project, while continuing to sell "Classmate", which dropped from \$400 to a very convenient \$200, but still much more expensive than the "XO". "There are an awful lot of educational scenarios between K and 12," said William Swope, Intel's director of corporate affairs, as cited by Wired.com. "We don't think all those are going to be served by any one form factor, by any one technology, by any one product." The initial wave of XO laptops use AMD processors, but of course that Intel will love to outmaneuver its rival and become the sole CPU supplier of the program. "We're going to go compete for the XO business, because we think we build first-class silicon," Swope said. Under the present agreement, Intel and OLPC will work on both technology improvements for the next generation low cost laptop and on educating its potential users. On the short term, this practically means Intel will support and develop two - until now rival - laptops, the XO and its own Classmate. Currently, OLPC is in talks with governments in over 30 countries in South America, Africa and Asia. OLPC needs a huge (at least 3 million units) number of orders to keep its agreements to buy low cost parts from hardware suppliers.