public school bureaucracy is motivating to even the most jaded school administrator. But what is really inspiring about the cyberschool is what it aims to accomplish. Can children who have never used a computer before learn to swap pencils and notebooks for hardware and software?

Critics were many, says Faltz. Skeptics wondered publicly if children could be trusted to act responsibly with such expensive equipment after school hours. But she now has evidence to prove that their fears were unfounded. So far this school year – and during the last school year, when the concept was piloted at the Parklawn YMCA with two classrooms – not a single student has abused the equipment or lost the privilege of taking it home.

"They know that any infractions will result in their losing the computer, and they aren't going to risk that," she adds. "Last year, we found that it was so important to them, they took really good care of their iBooks."

Children don't even leave them at home by mistake, she says, because their wireless laptops have given them something ordinary lessons could not: They have transformed learning into a desirable endeavor.

Faltz, who earned her doctorate in 1996 from the School of Education, started her career as a math instructor, teaching at two Milwaukee high schools. "I spent a lot of time in the classroom in the last 20 years watching students disengage," she says. "You can tell when you've lost them – there's a certain glazed look on their faces."

Later, when Faltz was director of pre-college programs at Marquette University, she became friends with Howard Fuller, education reformer and former MPS superintendent who now serves as Distinguished Professor of Education and director of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette. She remembers getting together with Fuller and other colleagues and analyzing various school reform ideas.

"After a while, we decided that it was time to put these ideas we'd been tossing around to work in our own school." She approached the City of Milwaukee to begin an application process for chartering a public school.

FIRST HURDLE: A BUILDING

As Faltz stood at the dedication of C³ last month, she remembered the night she landed a $4 million deal without even asking for it, an example of the enthusiastic response she got whenever she explained the school to community leaders.

She had arranged a meeting with representatives from Johnson Controls, seeking a cost estimate for key-card access for the proposed school building. "But once I told them what I was working on, they said, 'We think we can do a lot more for you.' "

Johnson Controls pledged access to financial support to help build the school in exchange for the contract to provide the building's heating and air conditioning systems. The school could then pay back the money by leasing-to-own the mechanical systems.

"In the end, we didn't spend a dime," she says, proudly. "And it was a business deal, not a gift."

It wasn't the first time Faltz received a positive response when asking for money. Before joining forces with Johnson Controls, she was the beneficiary of perfect timing.

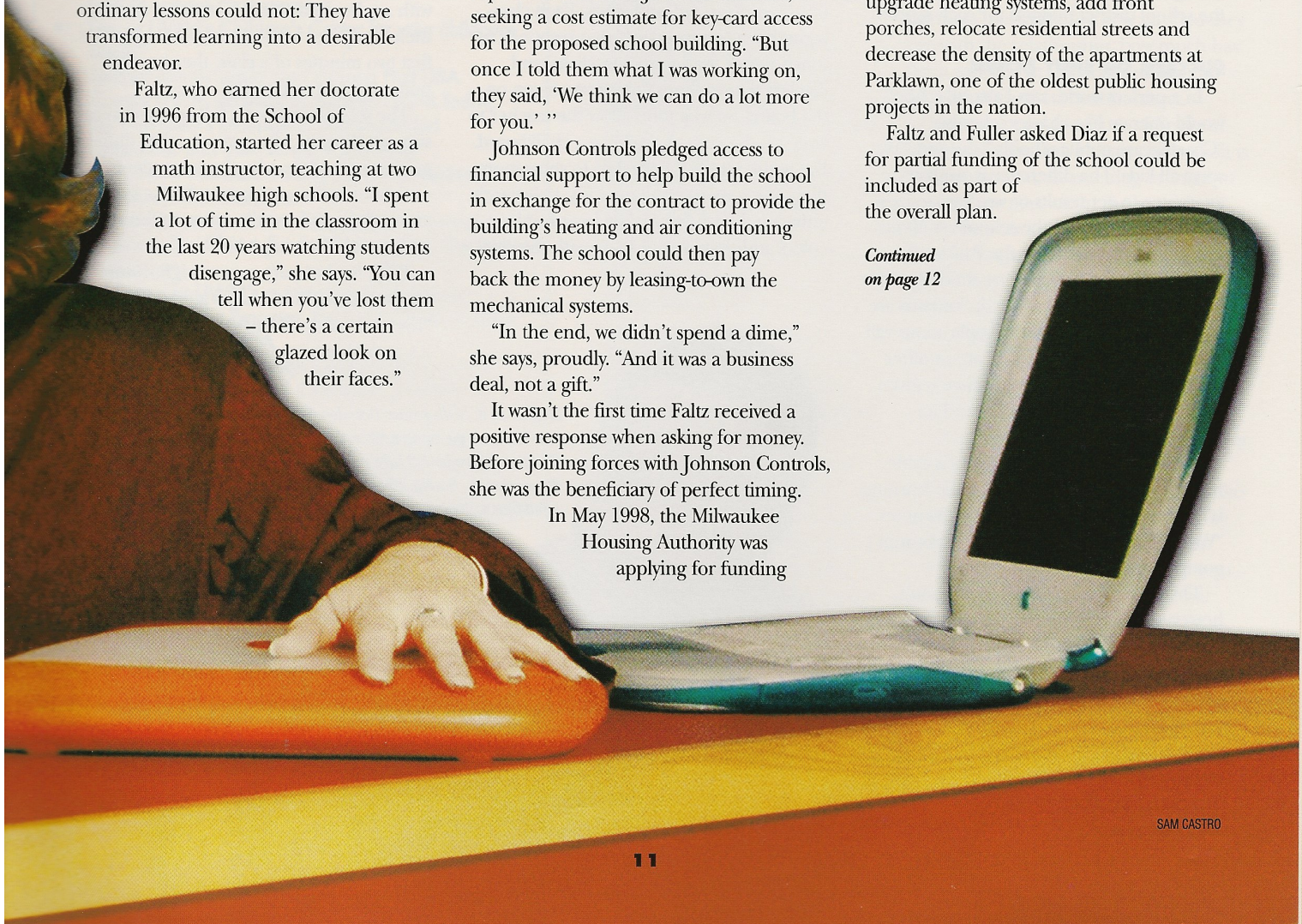In May 1998, the Milwaukee Housing Authority was applying for funding

DEB GENEROTZKY ('85, '89)

Fellow alum Ricardo Diaz introduced the cyberschool proposal to the Milwaukee Housing Authority. "Everyone I spoke to was very excited about it," he recalls.

through the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to renovate the Parklawn housing project on North 44th Street. Milwaukee officials were asking HUD for $35 million to upgrade heating systems, add front porches, relocate residential streets and decrease the density of the apartments at Parklawn, one of the oldest public housing projects in the nation.

Faltz and Fuller asked Diaz if a request for partial funding of the school could be included as part of the overall plan.

SAM CASTRO