

More than 70 High School Students Compete in Computer Science Teachers Association Coding Competition at Stockton University

Mainland Regional Takes 1st Place with Ocean City Taking 2nd and 3rd

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Friday, March 18, 2016

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Galloway, NJ – Alen Dimitriov, a junior at Mainland Regional High School, said he became interested in computer coding from his friend, Allen Andrews, who was sitting across the table from him getting ready for the Computer Science Teachers Association's (CSTA) Southern New Jersey Computer Science Competition.

They took a computer science class together as sophomores and wanted to continue learning, so they took the advanced placement class. Today, they came to Stockton University to compete against other high school students with similar interests.

More than 70 students from six area schools used the java programming language to solve a series of problems during the competition.

Others were just as enthusiastic about coding. Hau Pham, a senior at Egg Harbor Township High School, was interested in computers, so he took an elective class, in which he was able to craft a robot. His classmate, Selina Li, programmed a computer game from start to finish, and Emily Hua built a website.

Lynne Kesselman, president of the Computer Science Teachers Association's South Jersey chapter, was appreciative for the tremendous support from Stockton and the community to host the inaugural competition. Stockton Computer Science and Information Systems faculty members helped to create the problems and judge the competition with staff from the Office of Computer and Telecommunication Services and the Southern Regional Institute & Educational Technology Training Center (SRI & ETTC) helping to organize the event. **-more-**

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Bob Heinrich, chief information officer in the Office of Computer and Telecommunication Services, welcomed the students and told them, "You are growing up in a world that is much different" from his own childhood's era.

He recalled the early home computer he used as a child and explained that it had no internal storage and he had to write code to make it function. Then he pointed to the smartphone in his pocket as an example of the powerful computer devices of today. "Code powers our digital world," he said.

He also spoke of the expected growth in the number of coding jobs.

While the students competed, teachers and chaperones attended a lecture by Jacqui Chetty, a professor within the Department of Applied Information Systems (AIS) at the University of Johannesburg.

Chetty is visiting Stockton and area schools this month as part of a partnership between Stockton and her university that aims to help teach students in South Jersey and South Africa about computer coding to prepare them for the growing number of careers in the field.

During her lecture, Chetty spoke of her experiences in the New Jersey classrooms she has visited. She said local teachers' fear and anxiety about the technology disappeared in just 45 minutes as she introduced the fundamentals of coding and Scratch, a free programming language and online community for creating interactive stories, games and animations.

The teachers were amazed at how fun and easy it was to build a small program when given the fundamentals, she explained. Chetty went on to say that only 10 percent of U.S. schools offer computer programming.

Chetty met Amy Ackerman, an associate professor of Instructional Technology at Stockton, while they were each representing their universities as speakers at a conference in Finland. Their exchange of ideas developed into a partnership that has dedicated \$11,500, with matching funds from both universities, to advance coding education.

After the competition, Jenna Tracy and Beth Anne Castellano, sophomores at Egg Harbor Township High School, agreed they had fun. "It was exciting when we got a correct answer," Tracy said, and added that when the computer signaled an incorrect submission, the group pulled together to work as a team.

Regardless of whether it becomes a career, Tracy says that coding is a useful skill.

Castellano said that the questions were similar to what they've been learning in the classroom, but more challenging. "We had to put together all the concepts we've learned and spontaneously problem solve," she said.

Tony DiPietro is a Stockton Master of Arts in Instructional Technology graduate and a teacher at Egg Harbor Township High School.

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He volunteered during the competition as a member of the CSTA. Today was a great opportunity to provide awareness of the growing careers in the field and the opportunities in their future, he explained.

Before the awards were presented, Demetrios Roubos, assistant director of Information Systems and Security administrator at Stockton, shared his personal experiences as a former Stockton student, employee, and as an enthusiast of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), as well as gaming.

He spoke of the physics behind popular games and the how science and entertainment are intertwined. "Take a look at your smartphone. Someone is getting paid to design it. That could be you," he said, as he explained the diverse careers in the field.

Below are the winning teams.

1st Place: Mainland Regional High School

Jack Baxter
Lawrence Strenger
Matt Ognibene

2nd Place: Ocean City High School

Annabelle Gartner
Nick Eisele

3rd Place: Ocean City High School

Collin Kelly
Austin Fox

The competing schools were Absegami High School, Egg Harbor Township High School, Millville Senior High School, Middle Township High School, Ocean City High School and Mainland Regional High School.

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