

Tutoring association launches code writing camp in Milpitas

Will expand to Fremont, Berryessa, other areas in the fall

BY SHANNON CARR

Bay Area Tutoring Association understands that children in Silicon Valley are born “digitally aware,” constantly powered into the latest smart phone, tablet or PDA; watching animated films; and playing video games on a daily basis. They are turning this interest into inspiration through their latest community-based Computer Science initiative, Code-WritingKids.com, which has included summer and spring sessions designed to enhance learning capabilities and unlock the natural programmers and developers inside 21st Century children.

“I am not about babysitting when it comes to academic stuff, so these programs are as academically rigorous as they are fun,” association founder Chris Norwood said.

Its overarching goals are to introduce students to a wide breadth of technology: computer science, web development, video game design, animation and application design.

“We launched it during spring break (March 31-April 4) as our pilot,” Norwood said. The camp, which was housed at John Sinnott Elementary School, brought in 60 first-through sixth-grade students from across the district.

During that introductory camp, attendees were introduced to animation, Javascript and creating their own websites.

This evolved further for two sold-out summer sessions, held June 17 through July 3 and July 7 through 24, which brought approximately 40 students total between both camps to Anthony Spangler El-

ementary School.

“Summer programming was all about Computer Science Theory and learning how to use Scratch,” Norwood said.

“Scratch is a free programming language and online community where you can create your own interactive stories, games and animations,” its website explains.

Milpitas resident Roseann Chin said there were many benefits for her 11-year-old to participate in the summer program.

“She loves to play games. So I was hoping she would learn some programming stuff, and she has,” she said.

Milpitas resident Amy Lin agreed, saying her 9-year-old son attended a summer session.

“He loved it,” she said. “He is looking forward to doing another one.”

They both plan to enroll their children when camps are available again in the future.

This fall, Norwood said they will be launching code clubs in Milpitas as well as Fremont, Berryessa and Alum Rock schools districts.

“From a coding perspective, it was about inspiring a generation,” Norwood said of why he launched the program.

The idea came to him after he attended an education camp six months ago at Palo Alto High School with teachers from Menlo Park, Palo Alto and Atherton.

“They were talking about having code writing at the elementary school level and parents were driving all of this in these affluent areas,” Norwood said. “I went there and looked at Milpitas, Fre-



Students from Code Writing Camp for Kids' pilot program pose for a picture at John Sinnott Elementary School. The program brought in 60 first through sixth grade students from across the district for that session and another 40 for summer programming. It will expand further in the fall with clubs in Milpitas, Fremont and Berryessa, among other places.

Photo courtesy of Chris Norwood

mont and Berryessa ... and I was like, ‘We aren’t going to be there for three years if not longer.’”

So he decided to take matters into his own hands and create a fee-based program through Bay Area Tutoring Association that engages students in the technologies they already connect with on an everyday basis.

“The goal of our programs are to inspire kids to engage in computer science, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) and creative arts activities,” Norwood said. “Our code writing for kids programs enhance literacy, computer usage, typing, research, critical thinking, math, grammar and punctuation skills.”

Norwood said the program has room for lots of growth, and is looking forward to serving more students in the days, weeks

and months to come.

“I really look forward to seeing more and more kids enrolled in these sorts of activities because not only are they academically exciting but they are very helpful,” Norwood said.

“Technology is one of those equalizers where the more you know the more opportunities you have, regardless of ethnicity.”

For more information about Code Writing for Kids, visit codewritingkids.com.

Shannon Carr is a freelance writer and former Milpitas Post reporter. She is now the communications and social media specialist at Morgan Autism Center.

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