

Computer Engineering Class Leads to Immediate Job Placement



LITTLE ROCK – What teenager wouldn't like a class that has all of the *cool* gadgets of today like cell phones, tablets, laptops, and computers?

In the computer engineering technology class at Metropolitan Career-Technical Center, a vocational high school in the Little Rock School District, students embrace the 21st century devices to serve as their textbooks. Replacing

cracked phone and tablet screens and installing new operating systems on computers are just a few of the tasks in the teacher's lesson plans. The skills they learn also prepare them for the vast fields in ever-changing, ever-growing digital sphere.

"I've always been interested in computers. It started when I was thirteen," said Austin Whitfield, a senior.

Whitfield, who is homeschooled, is one of the students in the computer engineering technology class with a strong interest in computers and would like to pursue it as a career. (Any student either homeschooled or attend one of the schools in Pulaski County are allowed to attend Metropolitan.) Since he started taking the class, Whitfield has done everything from building a computer to setting up a network.

"We do a lot of troubleshooting. Sometimes we see problems that we have not seen before. We sit around and figure out how to fix it," Whitfield said.



The computers come from several places but mainly from the Little Rock School District's 46 schools. The technicians-in-waiting study the problem, declare a

diagnosis, and then make the needed repairs. It is a collaborative effort to fix the computers. David Crawford, their lively teacher, leads the endeavor.

“I tell my students all the time that I think this is one of the greatest opportunities ever,” Crawford said.

The computers are not just for classwork. After the students restore them to factory settings, they are re-entered into society. During the district’s periodical Computer Power Days, students enrolled in Little Rock schools can buy a computer and monitor for no more than fifty dollars, depending on family income. Comcast also chips in to provide Internet service at an extremely affordable rate,” Crawford said.

“It’s the Little Rock School District’s way of conquering the digital divide,” he said.

Crawford pushes his students not only to learn how to fix computers and other technological devices, but he also encourages them to get national certifications in various computer programs. Many of his students complete his class with certifications in Microsoft IT Academy and CompTIA Strata Fundamentals, two highly-revered certifications in the information technology world.

“You can’t get a better feeling knowing that you’ve armed students with something that’s actually going to take them somewhere. They can walk into a job, show the boss that certification, and get hired on the spot,” Crawford said.

Possessing those certifications got Taitmon Lynch nearly hired on the spot. A 2015 graduate of North Pulaski High School and product of Metropolitan Career-Technical Center, Lynch was hired at uBreakiFix, an electronics repair store in North Little Rock, over the summer. Three months on the job, he became assistant manager.

“I got ahead big time by going to Metropolitan. We learned a lot of customer service skills. We would interact with people about their computers because we had to fix them. Customer service is one of the things companies are looking for,” Lynch said.

Lynch earned his share of certifications while at Metropolitan. He said he daily uses those skills to repair the electronics that have stumped his customers.

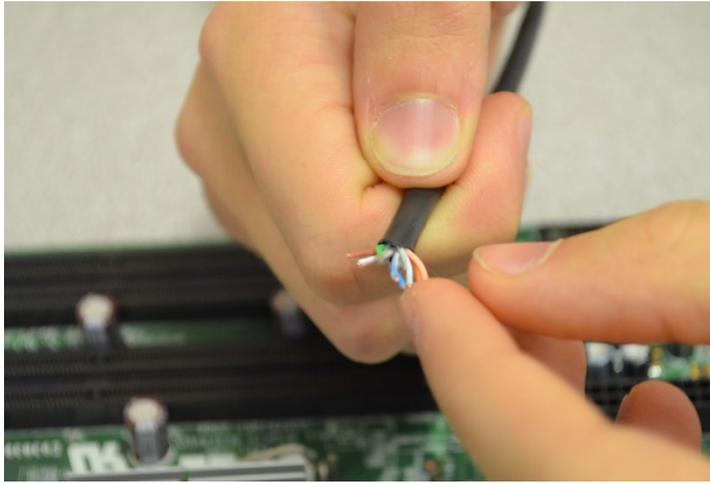
Matthew Harp, the owner of uBreakiFix, applauded Metropolitan.



Taitmon Lynch helps out a customer at uBreakiFix, where he is assistant manager.

“It tells me they really get them ready for the job experience. We could use more people in this field, especially coming straight out of high school,” he said.

That’s reassuring for Donald Crain, who has a few months left in Crawford’s computer



engineering class. He does not know which area he will pursue after graduation. All he knows is he loves computers.

“In ninth grade, I pretty much developed an interest in computers so once that interest grew, I pretty much built my first computer at home – before I was ever affiliated with this program,” Crain said.

Career and technical education is one of the four divisions of the Arkansas Department of Career Education (ACE). ACE has the mission of providing leadership and contributing resources to serve the diverse and changing career educational needs of Arkansas youth, adults, and persons living with disabilities. To learn more information, visit us at www.ace.arkansas.gov or follow us on Twitter at @ARCCareerEd.

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