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COMPUTER SCIENCE FAIR WINNERS
Students win trip to Google's newest office in Venice
BY LYNNEA LOMBARDO - SPECIAL TO THE DAILY PRESS

APPLE VALLEY • Amid the low blips and beeps of computer games, mighty cheers would ring out as frustrated and victorious players alike competed for a trip to Google's newest office.

Four high school students from the Lewis Center for Educational Research won the trip to Google on Tuesday night after spending weeks creating original computer games.

The winners of the second annual Computer Science Fair were judged in five major categories: originality, graphics, game play, entertainment and complexity. Of the five winners, two contestants tied for first place, but only four of the top scoring students won the coveted trip to Venice.

The trip, which is set for May 31, will include a tour of the Google facility, which is home to the world's largest Internet search giant. The winners will spend the day getting to know the programs, observing meetings, meeting employees and learning about the company's summer internship program.

Devon Kenneally and Jake Titherly both won first place, followed by Brandon Dill, Chelsea Faustino and Josh Palafox.

All 17 contestants were 11th- and 12thgraders in a state-of-the-art computer science class taught by David Kenneally, father to Devon Kenneally. Known by his students as "Dr. K.," Kenneally is the director of technology at the Lewis Center and created the computer science program five years ago after seeing that the careers of the future would require individuals with Internet technology experience.

"We know that not all of the students will go on to be IT professionals, but we hope that the kinds of skills they learn through the course can be applied to any filed that they choose," Kenneally said.

Among the panel of judges that night was Geoff Golliher, an engineer from Google and a former Victor Valley resident. Golliher worked at the Lewis Center for several years, and now has the opportunity to use his career at Google to inspire young people to pursue degrees in computer science.

After the judging was complete, Golliher met with the students and offered critique, professional feedback and advice on code writing and how to implement ideas into existing game plans.

After taking the yearlong elective course, many of the students have since decided to pursue computer science majors in college. Faustino, 17, one of the winners and class valedictorian, decided to change her major to computer science after taking Kenneally's gaming portion of the class. She secured her place in the Google trip by having the "most ambitious" creation, creating a Wii style game that tracks the players' body movements using an X-Box Kinect scanner.

In addition to hours in the classroom, many of the students said they spent most of their free time working on their games, testing their codewriting abilities on their family and friends. Both Devon Kenneally and Titherly impressed the panel with their ability to create games that incorporated other areas of arts and science, including physics and computer graphics. But the judges said all of the students' games surpassed their expectations.

The judging panel also included Ryan Dorcey, Sgt. Raymonte Britt and Johan Snider, a Lewis Center alumnus. Dorcey, the robotics class instructor, highlighted the evening with a robotic "soccer" game, an event in which the students remotely controlled small robots fixed with an attachment that enabled the robot to lift and carry a small ball.

"These kids did amazing things," Dorcey said. "They thought outside of the box, and that's what we try to get them to do here. We work hard to get them a good education."

Johan Snider, 19, is a Lewis Center graduate and just completed his first year at Cal State University, Monterey Bay. He chose computer science as his major after taking Kenneally's class.

"There's not a lot of exposure to computer science at this age level. It's hard to run programs like this, but I would have never gotten into it if it wasn't for this. It's the best choice I've made," Snider said.

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PLAYING GAMES: Paisley Willford, left, and Josh Palafox, center, play other students' games during the Academy of Academic Excellence's Computer Science Fair. The students were assigned to create games that could be played by other students.

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  NOT JUST A GAME: Chelea Faustino, center, monitors Zachary Woodruff, right, as he plays Faustino's game 'Sleep Time' during the Academy of Academic Excellence's Computer Science Fair. Faustino was the only entrant to use a kinetic-style game that is controlled by the gamer's full body movements.