



Christopher Henderson, Jacob Pebworth, Texas

Student Success Story: Birdville Center of Technology and Advanced Learning

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At the Birdville Center of Technology and Advanced Learning (BCTAL), two Cisco® Networking Academy® classes were commissioned to refurbish 200 school district computers for distribution to the community. The students designed a logo for the project, and wrote a simple user manual for recipients.

Christopher Henderson

One of these students is senior Chris Henderson, age 17, whose interest in ICT started in middle school. He took computer courses there, while his older brothers took Networking Academy courses in high school. Once in high school himself, Chris enrolled in IT Essentials, taught by Jan Haynie.

Jan and other instructors promote Networking Academy courses throughout the district. IT Essentials covers basic computer hardware and software functions, and how those are used in the real world. Students actually build computers and assemble networks.

Chris particularly liked the opportunity to work with lab equipment. “Working on the systems gave me a real feel for the devices and the logic of how they work together. I developed an ability to analyze a system and diagnose what input to apply to achieve a desired output.”

Prior to earning his CompTIA A+ certification, Chris reviewed questions and did practice sets to ensure his success. Now he looks forward to earning his Cisco CCENT™ and CCNA® certifications.

According to Jan, “Chris is one of those students who really does take on the task and complete it at his very best. He likes to excel. And Chris has been an integral part of the computer repair project, working on a huge number of PCs. He went beyond refurbishment, and enhanced them for functionality beyond the initial goals.”



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Each year in January, Business Professionals of America holds a PC troubleshooting skills contest, and Chris plans to participate. He hopes to attend either Rice University in Houston, or University of Texas in Austin. He visualizes a career as an engineer, possibly in networking. His advice for prospective students:

“Do it! Networking Academy online curriculum is really helpful. I’ve learned so much, and the labs and instruction make a big difference.”

Jacob Pebworth

Another participant in BCTAL was Jacob Pebworth, age 19. “I got exposed to computers early. My dad and a friend used to build PCs, and I accompanied them on trips to electronics stores. I played early computer games like Doom, Hexic and Hannibal, and took technology courses in middle school. From there, my interest never stopped.”

In high school, he attended the school’s annual Career Technology Convention and learned about Networking Academy courses. “I already knew the value of Cisco courses in the workplace. It was a great opportunity to take them tuition-free in high school. Earning a certification shows an aptitude for achievement, wanting to apply myself to be trained and become an expert.”

Prior to beginning the IT Essentials course, Jacob went to the library and scanned books on the subject, making the topics easier to digest in class. During the course, he enjoyed the 24/7 access to online course material, and found that the hands-on practice in the lab enabled

faster learning and retention. He was excited to develop the in-demand skills used in so many work environments.

Jacob wanted a head start on a future ICT or networking job. He earned his CompTIA A+ certification in 2008, and his CCENT and CCNA certifications in 2009, all prior to graduation from high school.

Instructor Mari McCuiston told him about Business Professionals of America competitions, which include ICT-centered events. Jacob entered the Cisco Systems Administration Competition, placing 3rd in the region, 1st in the state, and 3rd in the nation. He also participated in the 2009 NetRiders Skills Challenge. Jacob’s team won the state qualifier for Texas, scoring ahead of all the other Texas teams.

Instructor Jan Haynie says, “Jacob was a real focal point for our computer repair and donation program. He was the person who truly got the project off the ground. He created a logo for it, and he handled the first computer refurbishment, including loading and testing the software, to demonstrate what he wanted to do for the computer committee members. He created a user manual that showed recipients how to use their systems.”

Recipients of the refurbished computers were chosen using an impartial blind draw. Ideal families were those who needed to close the technology gap and get connected to the Internet at home for the first time. Jacob remembers one mother and her little boy who received a system. She hadn’t expected to be able to provide one in their home, and they were both ecstatic.

According to instructor Mari McCuiston, “Jacob is a well-rounded computer guru. He knows all of it, from the technical hardware to the networking. His communication skills are also a big strength.”

Jacob’s goals for the user manual were simple: provide basic step-by-step instructions, and avoid industry terms for these non-industry recipients. He utilized Adobe Photoshop, Adobe InDesign, and other programs to build the manual. The content writing was challenging, because it needed to be very precise and leave as little doubt as possible. Additional information was provided in brackets (for example, “[this is called an RJ-45]”), so that more technical terms were available if users were interested in learning more. And having these terms available could help during future tech support discussions. Jacob looks forward to a time when the average user has grown more accustomed to technology, and both tech and non-tech users will have a growing common ground for communication.

This year, Jacob is enrolled in Cisco CCNP® courses taught by Neil Brooks at Tarrant County College. He says the courses are going well, with plenty of material to digest quickly. He will soon take the CCNP certification exam, and is thinking about enrolling in the CCNA Security course, which is available at several academy locations in his area.

He hopes to complete two years at Tarrant, and then transfer to a university. “The CCNP certification should enable me to get a job that pays well enough to attend a university.” Jacob’s advice for prospective students:

“You don’t need to be very technical to succeed in the basic course. Previous courses in math, stats or logic will help prepare you, but critical thinking is what counts.”

For more information on the academy at Birdville Center of Technology and Advanced Learning, visit: <http://schools.birdvilleschools.net/17892092413544937/site/default.asp>