

# DEL MAR TIMES

## Technical school takes kids inside game programming

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By Manny Lopez

When Vic Wintress talks about changing kids' lives through Java, he's not talking about a cup of coffee or an island in the Pacific. He's talking about the high-level, object-oriented programming language that runs on any computer and powers about 90 percent of cell phones on the market today.

Through his school on High Bluff Drive, Wintress teaches kids as young as 8 years old how to write the software that makes websites such as MySpace, iTunes and YouTube work. His unique approach coupled with his love for teaching is helping to shape the future generation of computer-savvy professionals who will develop the technology of the future.

"Rather than have kids sitting at home playing video games, I would like to see them making video games," Wintress said. "Our mission is to spread the early technical education through the vehicle of Java."



Tammy Neuhaus gives instruction to Aaron Wilson.

A retired naval pilot and engineer, Wintress believes that kids in elementary and middle school can learn complex computer programming languages when they are taught in fun, age appropriate ways.

The secret, he said, lies in his approach to teaching. There isn't a traditional curriculum at Wintress Technical School, Inc. Students learn hands-on by doing. They start off by making video games such as Tic-Tac-Toe and Pong. As they create these games, they learn a little bit more.

"A lot of people think that computer programming involves mathematics," Wintress said, "but it doesn't. It's all logic."

Industry analysts predict a shortage of programmers in the future. Among the reasons Wintress cited for these dire predictions is a decrease in the perceived value of science, math and engineering skills within K-12 education. He also pointed out that there is a current shortage of qualified instructors with the experience and training to teach these subjects. According to the Computer Science Teachers Association, only 26 percent of high schools in the United States require some sort of computer science class.

The Computing Research Association said that the 170 institutions that grant computer science degrees in North America reported a total of 10,206 B.A. degree graduates for 2006. Nearly a 33 percent decrease from 2000 when there were more than 14,000 graduates. The U.S. Department of Labor predicts that 8 of the 10 fastest growing occupations through 2010 will be computer related.

As a result, salaries for programmers have been on the rise. The National Association of Colleges and Employers stated that the average salary offered to computer science graduates in 2007 was \$53,051. An increase of 4.5 percent and the highest reported to NACE in the past seven years.

Wintress said he sees computer programming as a rewarding and gratifying field. He said that there is a feeling of satisfaction that comes when you are able to solve a complex problem. He said that any vocation that you can possibly go into requires some knowledge of programming.

Aaron Wilson, a 15-year-old from Canyon Crest Academy, recently started attending classes at WTS and is already thinking about career opportunities. An avid gamer, Wilson hopes to develop a better understanding of the relationship between hardware and software.

WTS offers a small classroom environment, in which students receive almost one on one instruction. There is no set schedule, and hours are flexible. A central tenet of WTS is to be available for instruction when the students are available. Started in 2006, Wintress tells all pupils that they don't have to come if they don't want to.

"We only want motivated students who enjoy the learning," he said. "So far it seems to be working. Students are eager to return week after week for fun learning Java."

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