

WATCH: Point students program better future



Amanda Oglesby, @OglesbyAPP

10:46 a.m. EST February 18, 2016

Point Pleasant students learn that computer programming isn't just about making money, but about making lives better.



(Photo: THOMAS P. COSTELLO)

POINT PLEASANT — Jake Collier navigated a 3-D supermarket, where he roamed the digital isles and pointed to items that completed the game's shopping list.

Collier, an 18-year-old senior in Point Pleasant Borough High School (<http://www.pointpleasant.k12.nj.us/PPBHS/index.htm>), spent weeks creating a supermarket game so his peers with multiple disabilities could practice a task that will lead them to greater independence.

Life skills practice is an integral part of education for teenagers with special needs, but their teachers could only occasionally take them to the store to practice food shopping.

Collier expects his computer program to help change that.

"Wouldn't it be cool if we could make a software that would allow them to go shopping any time they wanted from the comfort of the school," said Collier. "Due to limited resources, they can't go to the shopping market every single day, but they can certainly hop on the computer whenever they need to and help out with those skills."

[5 transition tips for children with special needs \(/story/news/education/in-our-schools/2015/04/29/transition-tips-special-needs/26601943/\)](http://www.pointpleasant.k12.nj.us/PPBHS/index.htm)

The computer program is just one of the many ways students in Point Pleasant Borough High School's advanced software engineering class are using their skills to benefit their community.

Buy Photo



A screenshot from the app designed by Point Pleasant Borough High School software class students as a resource for special needs students. (Photo: THOMAS P. COSTELLO)

Nick Gattuso, the technology teacher who leads the class, found inspiration after he used early versions of Voice Over IP software to help a colleague who was partially paralyzed answer and make phone calls.

"He was able to start getting a little more freedom," Gattuso said. "At that point, I realized that – as the typical yuppie in the 80s and 90s making, you know, six figures – that there was a lot more to this than what we were doing. The technology could really help humanity. It wasn't just about making revenue for the company and taking stuff to the next generation. We were able to help."

[Financial planning required for special needs kids? \(/story/money/personal-finance/2015/02/20/special-needs-financial-planning/23740621/\)](https://www.asburyparkpress.com/story/money/personal-finance/2015/02/20/special-needs-financial-planning/23740621/)

That experience inspired Gattuso to years later launch Point Pleasant's PALS program, or Panther Assisted Learning Services, to get his young computer programmers involved in projects that benefit the community.

[Buy Photo](#)



Point Pleasant Borough High School technology teacher Nick Gattuso speaks to his software class Tuesday, February 17, 2016. (Photo: THOMAS P. COSTELLO)

His students recently completed an [Android app \(https://play.google.com/store/apps?hl=en\)](https://play.google.com/store/apps?hl=en) available on the [Google Play \(https://play.google.com/store\)](https://play.google.com/store) store that keeps Point Pleasant students in constant contact with school news, with nearby restaurants, and the class period schedule. The mobile app is even being outfitted to alert students in case of emergencies when they are off campus for lunch.

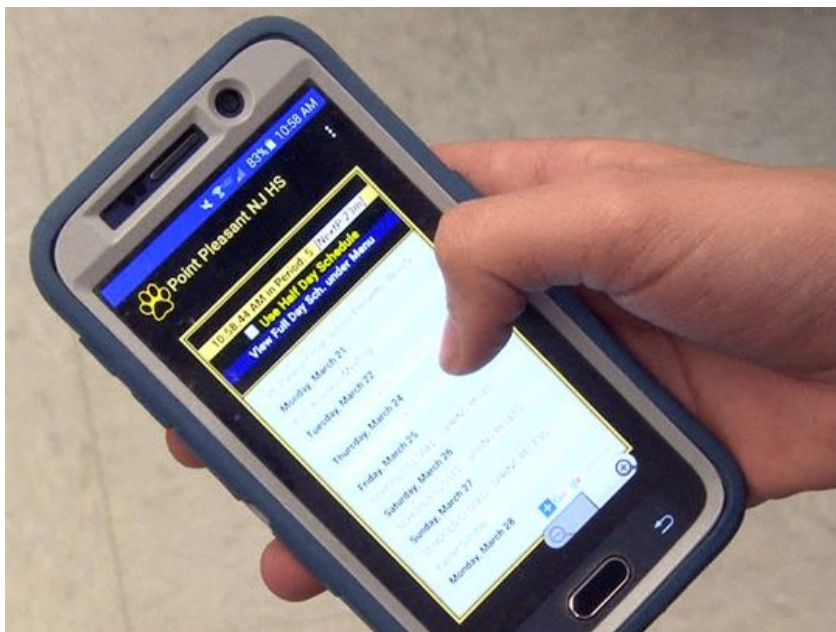
Gattuso envisions it someday earning money for the district. He hopes to get approval to let local eateries pay to send out coupons to students.

What kind of apps should students be designing? ["Like" us on Facebook \(https://www.facebook.com/asburyparkpress/?fref=ts\)](https://www.facebook.com/asburyparkpress/?fref=ts) or share your thoughts in the comments below.

"We're really kind of excited about the possibility of monetizing it," Gattuso said.

Kevin McDermitt, supervisor of technology for the school district, said the software "is as good if not better than other things you see on Google Play."

[Buy Photo](#)



Point Pleasant Borough High School senior Nicholas Gattuso, 17, Toms River, displays the app Tuesday, February 17, 2016, designed by the software class at the school as a resource for students (Photo: THOMAS P. COSTELLO)

It's projects like these that are getting Gattuso's students into some premier colleges. His own son, who also takes the advanced software engineer class, is headed to the Stevens Institute of Technology (<http://www.stevens.edu/sit/>) after working on the school's mobile app.

WATCH: Toms River's mentors lead and learn (</story/news/education/in-our-schools/2016/02/03/watch-toms-rivers-mentors-lead-and-learn/79122390/>)

Mary McKeon, a 17-year-old senior, also worked on the mobile app.

"I just love having the aspect of problem solving," said McKeon, who is waiting to hear if she will be accepted into Princeton University (<http://www.princeton.edu/main/>). "You have to figure out the most effective way to do that."

In the coming months, the students in advanced software engineering will be building a similar mobile app for Apple devices.

In business and college, "this is exactly what people want," said Jacquelyn Goss, a spokeswoman for the district. "This mirrors a real world environment."

Toms River students get excited about science (</story/news/education/in-our-schools/2016/02/16/toms-river-students-get-excited-science/80398040/>)

Amanda Oglesby: 732-557-5701; aoglesby@GannettNJ.com

Don't miss a thing



Download our apps and get alerts for local news, weather, traffic and more. Search "Asbury Park Press" in your app store or use these links from your device: iPhone app

(<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/asbury-park-press/id514649656?mt=8#>) | Android app for phone and tablet

(<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.gannett.local.library.news.app>) | iPad app (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/asbury-park-press-for-ipad/id600068887?mt=8#>)

>>> Subscribe (at a great sale price!) for full access. (<http://offers.app.com/WNE>) And, 'like' us on Facebook! (<https://www.facebook.com/asburyparkpress>)

Read or Share this story: <http://on.app.com/1XzKzuU>