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TCC Starts First New Program in Over a Decade

SEPTEMBER 10TH 2019 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Poplar Bluff, Missouri - The Poplar Bluff Technical Career Center has launched its first new program in over a decade this school year with the addition of computer science in what was once the health occupations classroom.

The instructor, Michael Barrett, received a full month of training through Project Lead The Way in Indianapolis over the summer in order to develop a transformative learning experience for students interested in the burgeoning career field.

“I’m 61 years old and I’m having a blast! I love teaching this stuff, and we’re just getting started. The further we go along, the better,” Barrett said. “And being able to substitute a math or science credit? My goodness, that’s a great opportunity! We’re gonna be packed with students.”

The career educator participated in consecutive workshops in July outlining PLTW Essentials and Principles, covering a year’s worth of curriculum in two-week blocks, he explained. The coursework—designed by the nation’s premier provider of science, technology, engineering and math curriculum and professional development—will teach app creation, coding and programming using software such as Blockly, Python and VEXcode.

"It allows you to think of new ways to problem-solve," commented senior Maria Powell, who was collaborating with classmate Jeremy Bell on Friday, Aug. 30, to create characters for an interactive game using MIT App Inventor. “It’s a disease,” added junior Aron Johnson, referring to the time one can spend working out the details.

Barrett, who obtained his master's degree in administration as well as a bachelor's in engineering management through Arkansas State University, spent almost 20 years of his tenure teaching advanced manufacturing at the Northeast Arkansas Career & Tech Center in Jonesboro, which was also a PLTW certified school. More recently he served as project director for Three Rivers College.

In May, the Missouri State Board of Education approved the updated computer science performance academic standards to include the core concept areas of computing systems, networks and the internet, data and analysis, algorithms and programming, and impacts of coding. Upon receiving district approval, high school students will have the option to substitute a computer science credit in place of a mathematics, science or practical arts credit toward graduation effective in 2019/20, according to a recent memo by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Last year, Gov. Mike Parson signed the STEM Education and Computer Science Bill into law at the Poplar Bluff High School campus in an effort to curb outsourcing and capture some of the job market in Missouri. Sen. Doug Libla of Poplar Bluff served as handler of the legislation, which also established a fund for future public or private financial support.

In January, the R-I Board of Education approved a proposal to add the program at the Technical Career Center, where startup funds are available under the federal Perkins Act and through matching enhancement grants. School officials are currently working on creating a weighted AP module of the program to be offered as early as spring semester, according to Director Charles Kinsey.

“We’re highlighting the fact that career and technical education in 2019 is not what people may think it was back in the 70s, 80s and even 90s,” Kinsey stated. “Students [pursuing] career technical fields, no matter the program, will attain the same entry-level of knowledge as college graduates, if not higher.”

Pictured: Maria Powell, a senior, performs a magic trick utilizing binary numbers. “With computer programming, math is our friend,” instructor Michael Barrett (left) says.

Photo and article submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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