Zip Code Wilmington creates a path from high school to Fortune 500 jobs

WILMINGTON, Del. (August 23, 2022) Delaware's first nonprofit coding school is known to provide the practical skills and training adult learners need to become professional software developers and data engineers. Most are surprised to learn, however, that through its B1ue N0te initiative and partnership with Year Up Wilmington, Zip Code Wilmington also partners with Delaware schools and community organizations to give youth and young adults a competitive start in this fast-growing field.

In 2016, Tyrell Hoxter was looking for a change from his warehouse job at Amazon when he heard about Zip Code Wilmington from a friend. After completing Zip Code's 12-week, immersive coding boot camp, Hoxter secured a job with Comcast, where he quickly rose from apprenticeship to full-time software developer and then to senior developer. Although he enjoyed his career in the software industry, he felt a distinct calling to give back to his community.

In 2018, Hoxter left his industry position and returned to Zip Code to develop a curriculum for a high school training program which he named "B1ue N0te." The purpose of the B1ue N0te training initiative is to provide high school students with the tools and skills they need to enter the software industry. With Zip Code's new B1ue N0te initiative (the name alludes to the famous jazz record label and the 1s and 0s of binary code), Hoxter brings a jobs-focused software development curriculum to high school classrooms and a unique co-teaching model not found in other youth training programs.

Many high schools cannot afford to hire and retain computer science teachers, Hoxter said, and if classes are offered, they're usually Advanced Placement, aimed at college-bound students. The B1ue N0te curriculum fills a significant gap by emphasizing practical software application building for students who may be looking for career opportunities right after graduation from high school. "I want to provide computer science options for students who see college-focused courses as a barrier to entry into the field of software development. You do not need a college degree to have a successful career in coding. I am living proof."

In 2017, Mikaila Akeredolu, another boot camp alumnus, decided to return to Zip Code due to a need to give back as a technical instructor. His focus was slightly different from Hoxter's; Akeredolu wanted to help young adults. Currently, Akeredolu teaches Java programming to young adults as part of a partnership with Year Up Wilmington, the local chapter of a national nonprofit organization. Year Up Wilmington collaborates with Wilmington University to provide students aged 18 to 24 with 12 months of free hands-on training for industry-specific roles and an internship with Wilmington's leading employers. Akeredolu's success as an instructor has resulted in receiving numerous awards including an Impact Award from the 2021 Millennial Summit.

After completing six months of classroom training, Year Up Wilmington software developer graduates are eligible to apply for internships with local area financial institutions and tech companies and then on to full-time coding jobs.

Together, Hoxter and Akeredolu see a clear path to success for Delaware high school students looking to get into coding without a college degree. After completing initial training with Hoxter through the B1ue N0te initiative in high schools, students will then be prepared to competitively apply to Year Up Wilmington's software developer training program. Upon completion of classroom training with Akeredolu through Year Up Wilmington, they will be placed into internships at leading companies and thus complete a pathway towards professional success.

For many diverse and economically disadvantaged students, this is an opportunity that can change the trajectory of their lives. "Before meeting me and being introduced to the B1ue N0te curriculum," Hoxter said, "many students couldn't begin to see themselves in software development. More minorities in the field means more minority youth can see themselves coding, which starts a chain reaction that allows them to say and believe, 'I can do this.' We want young people in our communities to be successful, and right now almost every corporate team needs more software developers."

Diverse talent also benefits the Fortune 500 companies, Akeredolu said. "Diverse teams succeed more because customers are diverse. If you're going to serve your customer to the max, you should have input from people that look like those customers."

To find out more about Zip Code Wilmington or the B1ue N0te training initiative from Zip Code Wilmington, visit zipcodewilmington.com and b1uen0te.com.

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Tyrell Hoxter, Technical Instructor, Zip Code Wilmington

Mikaila Akeredolu, Technical Instructor, Zip Code Wilmington