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Coders Unite!

Ohio Code Scholar Program Hosts Grant Imahara Coding Challenge at Southern State Community College

Southern State Community College's Ohio Code Scholar program is excited to host the Grant Imahara Coding Challenge event on May 5th, 2023, at the Central Campus in Hillsboro. The Ohio Code Scholar program includes several high schools throughout the region, with a mission to bring more coding and IT programs to high schools and grow options in those schools through projects, curriculum, and instructor credentialing.

As project and fiscal lead, Southern State's Ohio Code Scholar is a state-funded program that was privately advocated for and resulted in $240,000 per year for 5 years to help advance southern Ohio in the computer science field. This program would not be possible without Ohio State Senator Mr. Shane Wilkin as well as the late Dr. Shane Shope, who advocated at the State House to secure the needed funds to run this program.

Southern State Computer Science Professor Dr. Josh Montgomery is the programming lead for the Ohio Code Scholar program. Montgomery, along with Southern State Executive Director of Workforce Development Amy McClellan and the Communications team, has organized this event to bring in over 100 students, additional teachers, guest speakers, and confirmed distinguished judges in a competition-based day that celebrates the world of coding and STEM.

Students from Adena, Western Brown, Eastern Brown, Unioto, Chillicothe, and Pickaway-Ross Career Technical Center have created their own *Star Wars*-style droids with coding, wiring, painting, etc., to compete in the Grant Imahara Coding Challenge. The students will be judged based on the following categories: exceptional coding, exceptional paint job, exceptional wiring, craziest wiring, and best of show. The day will begin with encouraging words in the auditorium followed by breakout sessions, judging the droids, and an awards ceremony.

Distinguished judges include award-winning cosplayer and animatronics maker Tim O'Sullivan, Astromech Droid Builder and specialist in droid drive systems and dome animatronics; Doug Bickert, CEO and founder of the Theresa Sondra Jacobs S.T.E.A.M Experience foundation; Eric Jacobs; and Don Bies from the Grant Imahara STEAM Foundation.

"The goal," Dr. Montgomery said "is to judge the students' progress, and celebrate what they have accomplished. Not all students will be successful, but that is not the point; the point is that we are moving the needle forward in coding in southern Ohio. This little 22-lesson project has hopefully opened up a few eyes."

The Grant Imahara Coding Challenge is the first custom curriculum project for the Ohio Code Scholar program. Dr. Montgomery developed classes during the Star Wars Celebration convention in Anaheim in 2022, where he met amazing celebrities excited about the project and wanting to get involved.

Additional contributions to the Ohio Code Scholar program include a $5,000 donation by Mr. Don Bies with the Grant Imahara STEAM Foundation as well as a $30,000 donation provided by The Foundation for Appalachia Ohio. These donations to the Ohio program ensure all students have access to parts and supplies for their domes.

"We plan to continue moving the needle and working with schools in the area through the Ohio Coders project. We have funds, we have a vision, and we have interested students. I think we have all we need to continue finding and developing successful projects for the kids in our area," added Dr. Montgomery.

The Ohio Code Scholar program aims to bring more coding and IT programs to high schools in southern Ohio, and this event is a celebration of the success of the Grant Imahara Coding Challenge. The Ohio Code Scholar program is confident in the positive impact that these programs will have on the region's students and their future in computer science.

The Ohio Code Scholar program is available to any school in southern Ohio that is interested. Interested students and community members can contact Southern State's Amy McClellan at amcclellan@sscc.edu.

For more information on the Ohio Code Scholar program at Southern State Community College, please visit https://www.sscc.edu/academics/programs/ohio-coders.shtml.

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