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Miramonte Junior Google Code-in Grand Prize Winner

By Sophie Braccini



Hannah Pan at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Photo Sophie Braccini

Miramonte High School junior Hannah Pan, who founded her school's Software Design Club last fall, has not always been attracted to science, technology, engineering and math, but she got hooked when she took advanced math classes at DVC, and her love for coding recently paid off when she was named as one of 26 Grand Prize winners of the 2015 Google Code-in Contest.

Google Code-in is a competition for 13- to 17-year-old students in middle or high school who work with open source software organizations on a wide variety of tasks. Chosen among 980 students from 65 countries, the 26 winners will be treated to a trip to visit the Google campus for four days this summer, meet with Google engineers, and enjoy some fun in San Francisco.

While Pan enjoys coding, she says she got the most satisfaction from the collaborative process and participating in real work projects.

"There were 14 different open source organizations to choose from," explains Pan. "Each proposed different tasks, not all coding and not all very complex. I chose Haiku, an organization that is developing an operating system. Like a Haiku, they

want their product to be simple and elegant." Haiku is an open source operating system born out of the ashes of an operating system from the late 1990s called BeOS, which was developed by a company named Be Inc. from Menlo Park. Haiku has participated in the Google Code-In project since it started in 2010.

Before tackling the more difficult coding tasks during the eight-week-long competition, Pan took on beginner projects, such as designing a company T-shirt and creating a PowerPoint outreach presentation that she showed to her Miramonte club. She also took files from different places and put them together to build the operating system. "I was not exposed to that before; a lot of the struggles came from the fact that the instructions were not really specific for my Mac," she said, "but the mentors were really helpful and after that first learning curve, everything became a lot smoother."

She did coding tasks such as fixing bugs in software, documentation, outreach and research, quality assurance, and user interface. "It was pretty diverse and interesting," she said.

Scott McCreary, who was Pan's head mentor at Haiku, said that by the end of the contest, Pan was doing tasks that usually only students who have worked on Haiku for months would attempt, and she did a great job with those. "It was fun to see her progress through the contest," he said.

Pan said what she learned most from her mentors was to never give up. "There were a lot of obstacles, and time management issues," she said. "Sometimes I would think that I had done

enough, but the mentors pushed me and encouraged me to not settle for mediocrity and work my very best, and that was very important." She thinks that on average she must have worked about 30 hours a week during the eight weeks, with large fluctuations.

At the end of the eight weeks, the mentors each voted for the two students who had impressed them most.

Pan, who is also an accomplished pianist and volunteer tutor at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center, feels that coding is very likely going to be a part of her future. She plans to apply to UC Berkeley and Stanford next year.

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