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Acalanes students will work for college

By John T. Miller



From left, Acalanes students Clay Schmidt and Jeremy Ridge. Photo John T. Miller Photo John T. Miller

A pair of enterprising students from Acalanes High School has formed a business partnership focused on providing needed labor to community members, while also helping to fund their college educations.

Clay Schmidt came up with the idea near the beginning of his junior year after hearing from a couple of friends who had been working all summer. He texted his friend, Jeremy Ridge, and wondered if they could advertise and find enough part time work for themselves and their friends to save for college.

The cofounders, along with a core group of eight fellow students that have known each other since Stanley Middle School, are extremely busy with their classes, sports, and extra curricular activities, yet they still have more than enough energy to take on part-time jobs in their spare time to try and stash away money for their future educations.

"We've generally been able to work about eight hours every weekend," says Schmidt, "but it's really hard to find any spare hours during the week."

That's understandable. Both Schmidt and Ridge take three Honors or Advanced Placement courses each, maintain nearly perfect 4.0 GPAs while also participating in athletic activities. Schmidt plays football and tennis and Ridge is a top wrestler for the Dons.

Residents may have noticed door hanger advertisements, billing the group as "Local Helpers." The flier, along with word-of-mouth and a steady perusal of the Nextdoor Saranap website, has generated enough work to keep the group of students busy.

"We can do anything from manual labor, to baby sitting, to tech help or tutoring," says Schmidt. He mentioned that \$15 an hour is their suggested rate, but the client is encouraged to pay them what they are worth. "Sometimes we make mistakes, but we're willing to come back another day and make it right."

"Our goal is to work within the community and provide needed services to the people who live here, while also raising money for our own college education," added Ridge.

The two don't make any money for farming out work to others, but rather are glad to facilitate matching the community's needs with their friends' expertise.

Both Schmidt and Ridge give credit to their computer science teacher at Acalanes, Daniel Appel, for helping them to acquire the skills to make their undertaking a reality.

"We were given skills in his class that helped us create this business," said Schmidt, who is interested in pursuing software engineering and robotics in college.

Speaking of his students, Appel said, "Jeremy and Clay are the type who only need to see something once and then are off and running. After building simple websites in our AP Computer Science Principles course, they developed a personal website on their own. They did this based on their desire to improve the local community, and didn't receive any academic credit for it. I hope more students use computer science like Jeremy and Clay have done where local communities directly benefit."

Ridge, who hopes to go to an Ivy League college or perhaps Stanford, sees the enterprise as developing good relationships with community members. "A lot of older people need help in the garden, or in moving boxes. Sometimes their own child moves away and they need somebody to fill in."

The two will continue their endeavor through their senior year, but hope the idea will sustain itself. "When we're gone we hope it's not over," said Schmidt. "We hope that we can kick it down a year and someone else will carry it on."

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