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Job Front: Training offers pathway to IT careers

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Where there's demand, there is opportunity, and today there's opportunity in information technology. So says Darby Patterson, whose Sacramento Stride Center provides computer career training to low-income job-seekers facing barriers to employment.

"There's a steady demand for the IT sector – there's definitely a demand for it," said Patterson, local director of the nonprofit center.

Stride, with Goodwill Industries, is forming its class to train IT professionals in A+ certification. A+ certification is geared toward entry-level information technology professionals so that they demonstrate competency as computer technicians, with knowledge of operating systems, computer hardware and computer assembly.

The 22-week course begins March 31 at Goodwill Job Connection Center, 4207 Norwood Ave., Sacramento. Classes are 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Enrollment is limited to 24 students.

Students learn about computer hardware and software related to repairing computers as well as identifying viruses that infect them. Patterson said the training and certificate prepare students for positions as field and computer repair technicians and desktop and help desk support, among other jobs.

The training is rigorous: three hours a night, five days a week for 22 weeks.

"It's very structured, very demanding. It's anything but easy, but well worth it," Patterson said. The Stride program focuses on people with challenges in securing employment. Tuition is income-based, and grants and scholarships are available.

"Certification makes a big difference," Patterson said. "But the certification is not just for IT pros – it's very cross-sector. They're certified, which gives them a professional edge."

As part of the A+ certification program, Stride also provides training in good job habits and résumé writing. "It's a full-blown personal and professional skills course," Patterson said. "You have to be ready with the whole package."

Noah Whitley recently completed the course and is now working under contract for a state agency in Sacramento. Whitley had always been interested in computers, but the 29-year-old hadn't found the right career fit. He moved to Sacramento from Nevada City five years ago, but most of the jobs he landed here were in administrative and clerical roles.

"It wasn't very fulfilling, but it was a job," he said.

He learned about the Stride Center's class last summer at a local community center and signed up for the course.

“I enrolled at the last possible minute,” he said. “I was looking for work, but had no actual prospects,” Whitley said. “I thought the best way to find one was to have a changeable skill set.”

Whitley recently completed the A+ course and, through a staffing firm, quickly got work. Several others in earlier classes have been hired at Drexel University’s Sacramento campus, said Lynn Ryan, an associate technology support director at the campus.

“They’re eager to learn new technology, and they bring a fresh perspective,” Ryan said of the Stride students.

About a month into Whitley’s new gig, “it’s exactly what I wanted to do professionally,” he said. “I’m doing what I love to do, it’s demanding and I get a sense of satisfaction. It’s a good feeling.”

For more information on the Stride Center and its A+ Certification training, visit www.stridecenter.org, then select “classes.” For registration information, call Goodwill Job Connection weekdays at (916) 649-2531.

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