

08 OCT 2014



72° Clear

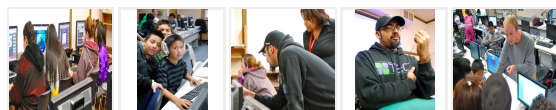


TEC Program Director Applauded

Technology education that reaches whole families is called 'inspirational' by one influential community group.

By Jennifer Squires (Patch Staff) (/users/jennifer-squires)

🕒 Updated January 6, 2012 at 7:58 pm | 💬



Editors Note: This is the second of a series of stories about Watsonville TEC, an award-winning program that encourages Watsonville youth to pursue careers in technology.

Years ago, when Jacob Martinez switched from Latino Studies to majoring in sciences at a UC Santa Cruz, he noticed there weren't a lot of people who looked like him in his classes.

The under-representation of Latinos in fields like computer science and engineering troubled Martinez and led him into a career where he teaches technology to students as early as the fifth grade through Watsonville Tecnología-Educación-Comunidad (<http://programservices.etr.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=projects.Summary&ProjectID=159>), an after school program that will be in 14 Watsonville elementary and middle schools this year.

"This was the perfect middle ground where I could work with youth and get them into sciences," said Martinez, now a 34-year-old father of three in Watsonville. "For me, it's kind of always been my line of work."

For his efforts, Martinez will be honored with a Nextie award later this month (<http://www.santacruznext.org/2012-nexties-winners>). The accolade is given out annually by Santa Cruz NEXT, an organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for area residents while addressing issues relevant to the next generation. Martinez is among to four people from Santa Cruz County selected from 38 nominees this year.

Peter Koht, chair of Santa Cruz NEXT said the effort made by Watsonville TEC to close the digital divide and extend the benefits of technology to under-served people, while providing a diversion program for possibly at-risk kids is "amazing."

"I think it comes down to it's inspirational," he said. "... I just think computers are great tools and you really can build a great career around how the Internet works."

But Martinez is not one for the spotlight. In a Watsonville TEC class, he hovers on the side of the room, dressed in the program's trademark black sweatshirt and sporting a goatee and dark-rimmed glasses. It's easy to mistake him for an intrigued father,

rather than an architect of a formidable program that has catapulted young students into the spotlight on the state and national level.

The Girl Game Company taught them how to design their own video games.

"The whole idea was to have girls access computer technology and the learned how to actually work with software and program to the point where they could create their own game and program the computer software," said Joe Trautwein, director of student services in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District.

Now the program includes those gaming classes for middle school girls and boys, as well as an elementary school component, a high school mentorship program and a tutorial for parents.

"There's no body else who does this comprehensive of a program for Latino families," Martinez explained.

Five nights a week, a computing center is open at a Watsonville school so parents can learn computer skills. A lot of it revolves around cyber safety and learning about what their children are doing, so the parents understand and can be supportive. Parents also create email accounts and learn word processing skills. One mom, a baker, created her own blog to promote her cake business.

"This whole parent component is about breaking down fears the families have (and) sending kids to college," Martinez said during an evening parent session EA Hall School.

Alejandro Flores, one of the mothers in the program, said she comes to the classes so she can help her daughter with school work. They don't have a computer at home.

"It's important to learn the Internet," Flores said in Spanish. She likes to read her news online.

Across town, fifth graders at stay after school to work with high school mentors on digital storytelling, a Watsonville TEC program dreamed up to improve kids' computer skills before they get to the video game design classes in middle school.

"The elementary students both gain access to a community of inspired role models and learn the skills necessary for subsequent classes they will take in Watsonville TEC," instructor Ryan Morgan said.

It's a chaotic scene. Groups of kids write scripts, then fill out storyboards depicting their short plays. They get distracted filming friends with digital recorders and looking up music on Yahoo!—excitement about technology that Morgan said is a good thing, so long as they're learning.

"There's a lot of enthusiasm," he said.

This is success to Martinez—opening minds in Watsonville to the possibilities technology and education can bring the community.

"He has a deep passion for it, I think," Trautwein said. "I think that's why he's winning awards. He's bridging that technology gap, especially in our lower socioeconomic communities. He's been dedicating his life to that."

Read more:

-
-

Also, in the interest of full disclosure, research for this series led Watsonville Patch to nominate Jacob Martinez for the Nextie honor.

Share This Article