

## ***Mukwonago High School IT Academy prepares students for technology careers***



***Mukwonago High School IT Academy students Jager Gieche (left) and Nick Lange unveil the banner for IT Academy during a grand opening celebration on Sept. 1. Photo By Carol Spaeth-Bauer***



By [Carol Spaeth-Bauer](#)

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One student, a senior, was overheard saying it's the first time he's been excited about the start of school.

As long-sleeved, T-shirt clad upperclassmen filled several rows of library chairs on a hot, humid day, they didn't have to be at school on the freshman only day. Yet, they came wearing shirts with the IT Academy logo, to celebrate the grand opening of the Mukwonago High School IT Academy on Sept. 1.

This first day was the fruition of an idea that started about three years ago, when Mukwonago High School computer science teachers Jim Ferwerda and Scott Pratt wondered what personalized learning would look like at the high school.

Couple that idea with job projections for computer science graduates estimating about 400,000 grads to fill about 1.4 million jobs by 2020.

## Effective program

With a definite need in the computer science field and a solid computer science program already in place at MHS, "we thought we were in a good position to provide a better, more effective program for students who want to major in computer science and technology," Ferwerda explained to the crowd gathered for the unveiling of the academy,

MHS has three certified computer science teachers: Ferwerda, Pratt and Sarah Wardecke, something unheard of even in larger districts. The MHS computer science program already offers seven different computer science courses and has shown a continued steady number of students who want to take courses. Jennifer Wolfe came on as the academy coordinator. Business partnerships were and continue to be developed.

After completing required core curriculum, IT Academy students can pick a course of study depending on their interests and skills — programming or software development, networking or hardware, or information management. From that, students would create personal portfolios, experience internships with business partners, and complete a capstone project to achieve the MHS IT Certificate.

While none of the teachers can provide the business experience, "that's why we have business partners," Ferwerda added.

Jeff Fons, general manager of Services Growth Strategies with GE Healthcare and a member of the IT Academy advisory board, told students they would get the chance to learn how to work with teams sitting next to them or across the globe, practice problem solving, public speaking, and learn how to communicate to solve problems. And the Academy business partners would listen to ideas from the students.

## Real-life experiences

IT Academy student ambassador Jager Gieche, a senior, plans to go to UW-Whitewater for computer science. He hopes to get a degree in security analysis and is looking forward to the "awesome real world experience" he will get through his capstone project.

"Hopefully that will help me decide if security analysis is really something I want to get into," Gieche said.

Student ambassador Nick Lange, who is looking at going to Lakeland College for computer programming, likes the academy because students can "pick what you want to do and how you're going to do it."

"I'm just excited for all the internships we can get to help with real-world experience," Lange said.

Kadee Jankowski, another of the five student ambassadors for the academy, is also excited about the "experience that I couldn't get inside of a classroom." She has already been accepted into the software engineering program at Carroll University and Michigan Tech.

"I really think this will help me choose exactly what I want to do with my life," Jankowski said. "I'm really excited to be part of this."

As IT Academy teachers, students and business partners prepared to start the year, Mukwonago Area School District Superintendent Shawn McNulty recognized the hardworking students, dedicated staff members and supportive community, which exemplify the district motto of students, staff and community.

"That's why I'm confident this IT Academy is going to be a success," McNulty said.