

News from the Savannah River Site

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hour of Code: Unlocking the Mysteries of Computer Science in Area Schools

AIKEN, S.C., (January 19, 2018) – Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) information technology employees recently helped area students decipher the often-perceived mystery of computer programming as a part of National Computer Science Week.

Computer programming is a crucial element of many businesses and industries though out the Central Savannah River Area,” said Kim Mitchell, SRNS Education Outreach. “Most students grow up with little exposure to programming and often look at it as a kind of obscure foreign language.”

Working with educators from Silver Bluff High School, SRNS employee volunteers recently took an important step to help correct this misconception. And, they did so with young, enthusiastic information technology (IT) professionals as role models.

“In order to truly reach these students, we knew it would require an effective conversation about fundamental computer science principles that the students could easily understand, relate to and see the potential ‘real world’ application in their homes and future workplace,” said Bo Birdsong, SRNS Information Technology. “Our success would be measured with their level of acceptance that computer programming could be rewarding and an important aspect of a wide variety of potential careers.”

Mitchell explained that this outreach program started when SRNS was recently invited by the Department of Energy’s (DOE) Argonne National Laboratory to join multiple DOE sites to celebrate the international “Hour



SRNS IT employees Jon Gore (left) and Bo Birdsong recently visited Silver Bluff High School as a part of the international Hour of Code Initiative. Silver Bluff teacher, Debbie Niiya, acknowledged the benefits of the National Computer Science Week initiative and the team of SRNS employees who made it possible.

of Code” Initiative. This global initiative elevates the awareness of the importance of computer science in education, K-12, by encouraging children to spend one hour creating a simple computer program. It’s this hands-on experience that often leads to the desire to pursue a two- or four-year degree in computer science.

This is the first school year SRNS has attempted to participate in a program seeking to open the minds of local students to the advantages of exploring and valuing computer programming, a much sought-after skill for companies locally and nationally.

SRNS IT professional Len Bowers stated that he and his co-workers were pleased to offer a look at “a day in the life” of a software developer and related career fields at SRNS.

“The impact on our students was notable,” said Debbie Niiya, Business Education & Information Technology Teacher, Silver Bluff High School. “Now they have positive role models to consider and a new goal to work towards. I am grateful for the time spent with our students and the impact on their lives.”

Computer science drives innovation throughout the U.S. economy; however, according to the Computer Science Week organization it remains marginalized throughout K-12 education.

- Only 35 states allow students to count computer science courses toward high school graduation.
- Currently, there are nearly 500,000 open computing jobs nationwide.
- Last year, only 43,000 computer science students graduated into the workforce.

And, though over 70 percent of all new STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) jobs are in the field of computing and only eight percent of STEM graduates are in computer science. Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, along with their DOE partners at other sites are working to solve this problem.

“This year, it’s one local school impacted by our IT employees. Next year, our plans are to expand the SRNS-supported Hour of Code program to multiple schools in multiple counties,” Mitchell explained.

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions is a Fluor-led company whose members are Fluor Federal Services, Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site, including the Savannah River National Laboratory, located near Aiken, South Carolina.

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