

The Volunteer View

The Monthly Newsletter for Marin County Civic Center Volunteers and Student Interns

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Interns Initiate Popular Coding Class for Kids

By Shirley Trimble

Two imaginative and tech-savvy Redwood High School juniors, **Austin Patel** and **Achinthya Poduval**, came to Corte Madera Children’s Librarian **Marilyn Wronsky** last summer with a proposal for a new class. Their idea: Teach kids to program using a simple visual programming language, Scratch. The kids would create games using Scratch and Java. Two-hour game-making workshops were to be taught by members of the Redwood Programming Club on Saturdays in July.

Working with Marilyn, interns Austin and Achinthy developed games, sent out recruitment flyers, and attracted more than 20 kids for each coding class. The classes proved so popular with the 8- to 13-year-old crowd that more courses were added in fall and spring. So far, 60 youngsters have taken the course.

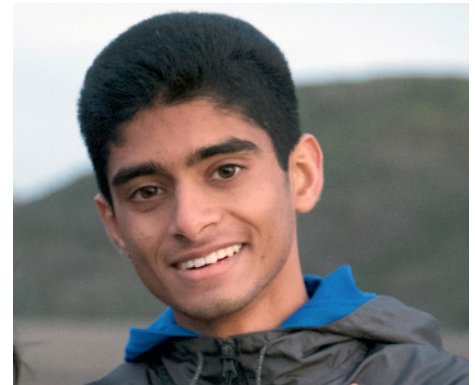
“We teach programming as a fun thing to do so the kids are more likely to keep going,” explained Austin. As interns, “we’ve learned a lot from teaching. At first, we helped one-on-one, but then added a demonstration on the big screen. We learned to organize the kids by their level of experience.” They also recruited several members of the Redwood Programming Club to help instruct and mentor.



Austin Patel

Marilyn said the response from kids, teen experts, parents, and staff has been uniformly enthusiastic. “Five stars! The coding classes absolutely fit the library’s offerings,” she reported. “We’ve increased the number of books on coding, especially ones directed toward girls. With the teens as instructors, everyone has fun together. The boys are wonderful role models,” she added.

Friends since second grade, Achinthy and Austin created the Redwood Programming Club last spring after taking a computer science class. Besides teaching, both boys enter hackathons in Silicon Valley where they compete against all ages. Both have fathers who are software engineers. Achinthy plays soccer and runs track and has a



Achinthya Poduval

younger brother who is learning coding. Austin has a keen interest in biology, runs track and cross country, and has an older brother who is studying computer science.

“The coding classes are a great way for us to do community outreach,” said Achinthy. “We’re both seniors next fall, and we have in mind a couple of Programming Club members to take over the classes if we get too busy our senior year or when we leave for college.”

Students interested in county internships may contact Civic Center Volunteers Internships Coordinator **Joy Fossett** at jfossett@marincounty.org.

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VOLUNTEER NOTES

Board Accepts Report on Impact of Volunteers and Interns

On March 13, the Board of Supervisors accepted the Civic Center Volunteers Annual Impact Report, which shows that 7,544 volunteers and interns gave 238,842 hours of service in fiscal year 2016-2017. Look for an article with further details in our April newsletter.

Intern Opinions Needed!

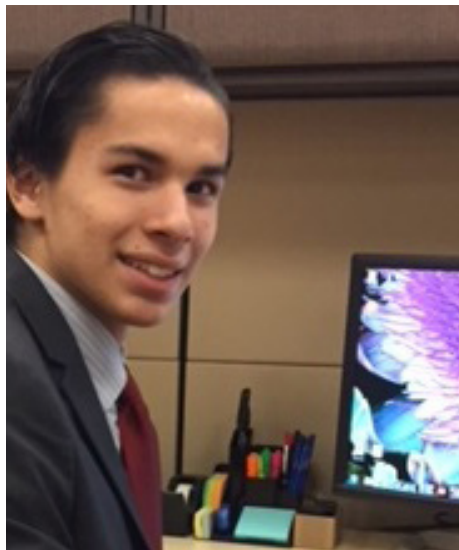
In an effort to better serve student interns across the county organization, the CCV office plans to hold a special interns-only meeting in April. Students willing to discuss their intern experience are welcome. To be added to the invitation list, please contact Internships Coordinator **Joy Fossett** at jfossett@marincounty.org or 415-473-7447.

Gap-Year Student Assists in Criminal Cases

By Mandy Behbehani

In a smart charcoal suit, striped shirt, and red tie, **Dustin Ercolano** looks every bit the lawyer he unquestionably will be. And if the suit belies his youthful appearance, the confidence that radiates from the gap-year intern in the Public Defender's Office makes it clear he will get exactly where he wants to go. "I don't have to wear a suit," he said, "but if I were a client, I would expect it. It shows you're serious about your job."

PHOTO BY MANDY BEHBEHANI



Dustin Ercolano

Dustin, 21, who graduated from the University of San Francisco last spring, is serious about his internship. He has logged over 1,000 hours learning all he can about what goes into defending those charged with crimes who lack the resources to fight the charges.

"Dustin is very bright," said his staff supervisor, Deputy Public Defender **Pedro Oliveros**. "He's so advanced I invited him to join a group of law interns in an interactive exercise on how to pick a jury."

Dustin, who has automatic admission to USF's School of Law for the fall and is waiting to hear from other schools he applied to, has worked on a murder case while at the PD's office. "I've relied on him for his opinions and observations," said Pedro. "I took him to the crime scene to reenact the crime the way we thought it had occurred. I relied on his thoughts and they were very solid theories that we're still working with. We talked about the motivations, and also came up with possible defenses."

Dustin also has organized the office's electronic case system, visited the

jail to meet with clients, observed court proceedings, and helped prepare a brief used in court.

He has wanted to be an attorney since second grade. "I was having an argument with my little brother and my mom said, 'You love to argue; you'd make a good lawyer.' The word just got into my brain. I like law because you get to argue, but it's on behalf of someone who might not be able to argue for himself," Dustin added. "Anyone can say, 'I'm not guilty,' but the law has a very particular lexicon, and unless you're a lawyer you can't really defend yourself."

Dustin is pondering where he will specialize. "My perspective is that you have the defense and the prosecution and they both argue for the interests of the public, and two lawyers defending their clients will make the most just outcome. I can see myself on either side of that.

"The reason I like the public defender's office is that I'm working with people who have some of the biggest hearts," he says. "It takes a very special person to work day in and day out with people society has written off."

Where Are Former Public Defender Interns Serving?

The Marin County Public Defender's (PD) staff proudly tracks the status of former interns pursuing legal careers, many of them in local government offices around the state.

On a wall of the PD's library/meeting room is a colorful California map with name flags pinned at cities and counties where alums are working. The Bay Area has the highest concentration, and there are names near the Oregon border, in the Central Valley, and south of Los Angeles.

The robust legal internship program is sponsored by Chief Public Defender **Jose Varela** and supported by department professionals, many of whom supervise interns. Students interested in the law gain experience and learn about the legal field. The program has levels from high school to post-bar. Students explore investigations, legal strategy, case preparation, courtroom procedures, and more.



PHOTO BY PATRICK TROUBETZKOY

Staff supervisor Pedro Oliveros adds a former intern's name to the state map.

Chaplain Is Calm Presence in Times of Crisis

By Natalie Dybeck

You don't always need the right words, or words at all, to help. "Being a calming presence for a family is an amazing experience; no words are needed most of the time," says Civic Center Volunteer **Cachitin 'Cachy' Brister**, a Marin County Sheriff's Office chaplain.

Cachitin's main responsibility as a chaplain is "to support the deputy who called for my support. Most of the time, it is a death notification. In addition to helping staff members, I may help a bereaved family by making phone calls, praying if they request it, giving information about available community services, and more," she explained.

During the North Bay wildfires last October, she volunteered at the Marin Center evacuation shelter. Stepping into the room and hearing evacuees speak Spanish "made my heart skip a beat, as that is my primary language." While helping children, "it was interesting that my chaplain uniform seemed to bring the little ones comfort and peace." After the first day, trust was established,

and "I was able to pray with many, and many tears were shed on my shoulder." During the crisis, she helped schedule a Catholic mass, held a Protestant service, and also translated for the fire chief when he updated the families with new information. Overall, the experience was "incredibly humbling," she said.

Cachitin came to the United States from Cuba at age 14 and married when she was 18. After 28 years as a special education paraeducator with the Marin County Office of Education, she retired three years ago. Now, in addition to volunteering as a chaplain, she is a translator for public and private education systems. She is an elder in her church, a communications teacher, a mentor at a home for single moms – and she and her husband of 51 years do marriage coaching. Her roles are varied, but all require compassion.

For Cachitin, the most rewarding part of serving as a chaplain is the opportunity to support deputies by offering "a calm presence to the crisis at hand."



PHOTO COURTESY OF CACHY BRISTER

Cachitin 'Cachy' Brister

Her staff supervisor, Sheriff's Lt. **Jamie Scardina**, said, "The five volunteer chaplains, including Cachy, are available to help all Sheriff's Office employees in times of need. They have built their foundation on the values of trust and confidentiality."

Happy Anniversary!

We congratulate these volunteers who celebrate their anniversaries this month and thank them for their involvement.

21 YEARS

Mary Bowles (Tiburon), **Roger Felton** (Belvedere), **Helen Lindqvist** (Tiburon), **Rosine Reynolds** (Larkspur), Stewards, Parks

18 YEARS

Grant Pritchard (Novato), Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service/Auxiliary Communications Service (RACES/ACS), Sheriff

17 YEARS

James Malaspina (Palm Springs) and **Al Baumann** (Petaluma), Patrol Volunteers, Parks

12 YEARS

Barbara Levin (San Rafael) and **Nora Martinis** (Corte Madera), Senior Peer Counselors, Health and Human Services (HHS)

11 YEARS

Robert Eichstaedt (Larkspur) and **John Channell** (Woodacre), Search & Rescue Volunteers, Sheriff

9 YEARS

Cara Wasden (Petaluma), Senior Access Reader, Novato Library; **Sandra Walker** (San Rafael), Chaplain, Sheriff

7 YEARS

Kathryn Mitchell-Ball (San Rafael), Senior Peer Counselor, HHS; **Si Si Semple** (Novato), Administrative Aide, Cultural Services; **Donald Johnson** (Fairfax), Patrol Volunteer, Parks

6 YEARS

Andrew Pope (Sausalito), Maintenance Aide, Community Development Agency

5 YEARS

Susan Buster (Woodacre), Shelver, Fairfax Library

4 YEARS

Jen Bach (Tomales), Volunteer Tomales Firefighter, Fire; **Francesco Cico** (San Anselmo) and **Zach Martinez** (Novato), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteers, Sheriff

2 YEARS

Earl McCowan (Novato) and **Marty McCowan** (Novato), Patrol Volunteers, Parks; **Stephen Sarhad** (San Rafael), RACES/ACS Volunteer, Sheriff; **David Ball** (San Rafael), Consumer Mediator, District Attorney's Office

1 YEAR

Robin Meisel (San Rafael), Ombudsman, HHS; **Satvik Namburu** (San Rafael), Teen Program Intern, Civic Center Library; **Richard Gordon** (Novato), English Tutor, Novato Library; **Andrew Bettini** (San Francisco), **Lotte Kaefter** (Fairfax), **Nicholas Koo** (El Sobrante); **Marcia McEwen** (Novato), **Eric Oldendick** (Fairfax), **Chris Patella** (San Francisco), **Michael Synyard** (Berkeley), **Celena Tanguay** (Oakland), **Adam Vasquez** (Larkspur), Search & Rescue Volunteers, Sheriff; **Theodore Kaefter** (Fairfax), **Tim Koen** (Larkspur), **Sydney Lundquist** (Dublin), **Forrest Strawbridge** (Mill Valley), **Maxwell Tripp** (Mill Valley), **Dalynn McEwen** (Novato), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteers, Sheriff.

Who's New & Welcome!

Tara Alkadiry (San Francisco), Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Pavee Aswanetmanee (San Rafael), Teen Shelver, Civic Center Library

James Baker (Mill Valley), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Hallie Balch (San Rafael), District 2 Intern, Board of Supervisors (BOS)

Bradley Batista (San Rafael), Juvenile Services Intern, Probation

Carolyn Beazley (San Anselmo), Wildfire Preparedness Clerical Aide, Fire

Coby Boczek (Mill Valley), RxSafe Marin Social Media Intern, Health and Human Services (HHS)

Karole Calvin (Inverness), English as a Second Language (ESL) Tutor, Point Reyes Library

Ana Camara Flores (Novato), Criminal Support Intern/Prosecution, District Attorney's Office (DA)

Nancy Castillo (San Rafael), CAPA Nursing Student, HHS

Melanie Chan (San Jose), Nutrition Wellness Intern, HHS

Angela Chavez (Novato), High School Intern, Public Defender's Office (PD)

Georgia Cox (Mill Valley), Marin Teen Girl Ambassador, Human Resources (HR)

Anya Cutter (San Anselmo), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Shae Daly (San Rafael), District 2 Intern, BOS

Kalyn Dawes (Corte Madera), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Mattie DeMar (San Francisco), CAPA Nursing Student, HHS

Lawrence Enos (Inverness), ESL Tutor, Point Reyes Library

Azita Fallah (Novato), Sustainability Intern, Community Development Agency

Desarae Finck-Fugazi (San Rafael), Medical Therapy Unit Intern, HHS

Abi Fitzgerald (San Rafael), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Marie Fitzgerald (Mill Valley), Wildfire Preparedness Clerical Aide, Fire

Nicholas Forbes (Tiburon), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Nicole Fuches (Greenbrae), District 2 Intern, BOS

Tucker Grooms (Mill Valley), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Johnny Gullett (Oakland), Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Gillian Higa (San Francisco), CAPA Nursing Student, HHS

Nicholas Ibarra (Petaluma), CAPA Nursing Student, HHS

Allyssia Jamir (San Francisco), CAPA Nursing Student, HHS

Mayana Jean Charles (Novato), Tobacco Prevention & Education Intern, HHS

Emma Kelly (Tiburon), Nutrition Wellness Intern, HHS

Kate Larsen (Fairfax), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Elizabeth McCall (San Francisco), CAPA Nursing Student, HHS

Kaith Monterroso (San Rafael), Marin Teen Girl Ambassador, HR

Marissa Morris (Santa Rosa), Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Sierra Najolia (San Rafael), Adult Case Management Class Intern, HHS

Mia Nguyen (San Rafael), Adult Case Management Class Intern, HHS

Yamilex Ochoa (Napa), CAPA Nursing Student, HHS

Maddie O'Keefe (Mill Valley), Marin Teen Girl Ambassador, HR

Eva Oppenheimer (Tiburon), Stormwater Pollution Prevention Intern, DPW

Cathelina Padilla-Schoop (San Francisco), CAPA Nursing Student, HHS

Praveena Reddy (Corte Madera), Shelver, Corte Madera Library

Jackson Ronald (Mill Valley), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Madeleine Serkissian (Guerneville), Homeless Policy Program Aide, HHS

Meiting Shan (San Francisco), CAPA Nursing Student, HHS

Devan Simmons (San Francisco), CAPA Nursing Student, HHS

Jesse Smith (San Anselmo), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Olivia Sohn (San Francisco), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Shayna Strauch (San Rafael), Epidemiology Intern, HHS

William Timpson (Greenbrae), Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Sabrina Tripp (Mill Valley), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Jillian Valdez (Livermore), Adult Case Management Class Intern, HHS

Quincy Webster (Corte Madera), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

Hannah Weigand (Novato), Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Andrew Wietstock (San Francisco), Search & Rescue Volunteer, Sheriff

Lisa Wood (Petaluma), CAPA Nursing Student, HHS

Josephine Yee (Corte Madera), Tobacco Prevention & Education Intern, HHS

Natalie Yuen (Rohnert Park), CAPA Nursing Student, HHS

Steven Zarranonandia (San Rafael), Search & Rescue Youth Volunteer, Sheriff

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