MICROSOFT SCHOLARSHIPS

With a mission to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more, Microsoft has reached out to Southside Virginia in a big way. There are 14 current recipients of the Microsoft Datacenter Scholarship. The scholarship makes it possible for the students to take classes in Information Technology.

The recipients of these awards were recognized with a ceremony and dinner held at the Estes Community Center on June 11, 2018.   The students take classes through Southside Virginia Community College's Center for Information Technology Excellence (CITE) at the Lake Country Advanced Knowledge Center in South Hill and the IT Academy (ITA) of the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center in South Boston.

In his remarks, SVCC President Dr. Al Roberts said, "Program development in higher education is often a very slow process, but our experience at Southside is that the development process can be accelerated when there is strong industry support."

He added, "When recruiting students into a new program, there are usually two questions: One – How am I going to pay for the training? And two – Does it lead to a good job with family-sustaining wages? Microsoft has responded to both concerns, first through its Datacenter Academy Scholarship and, secondly, through the possibility of employment in a world-class IT organization. What Microsoft has done is to remove the barriers that often hinder student success and allow students to focus on learning and networking – both IT and social – so that they can succeed."

Anthony Putorek, Microsoft Global Datacenter Field and Community Program Manager, said, "The effort of these students to go to class, the desire to learn, the hunger to do more fuels us. That is why Microsoft puts in the effort to provide these programs."

In 2010, Microsoft announced their investment in bringing a data center to Mecklenburg County's Boydton Industrial Park. Now, the company is investing in training Southside people for jobs where IT skills are needed.

"In addition to bringing well-paying jobs to Southern Virginia, Microsoft is empowering individuals through the scholarships to gain the skills required to qualify for these jobs. How wonderful is that!" said Dr. Betty H. Adams, Executive Director of the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center.

Scholarships are awarded to individuals from underrepresented populations in the IT field and cover tuition, books, and supplies.

"Opportunities abound for students willing to work hard with the cutting-edge technology available locally," according to SVCC Dean of Career and Occupational Technology, Chad Patton.

"The CITE and ITA labs are an example of how a partnership can make things happen for a community. The ongoing involvement of Microsoft is crucial for Southside Virginia. One amazing thing is that Microsoft wants every student to succeed whether they eventually come to the data center or attain employment elsewhere."

SVHEC IT Academy Program Coordinator and Trainer Kelly Shotwell echoed his sentiment stating, "The partnership with Microsoft has been invaluable for the IT Academy. Microsoft donates equipment that enhances the hands-on experience of our training labs, a Microsoft team visits each class to talk with trainees about careers, and the Datacenter Academy Scholarships remove financial barriers to make training more accessible. But Microsoft is not just encouraging a pipeline to employment at the Boydton data center. Instead, they believe that their partnership with the IT Academy benefits every trainee and every employer who hires an IT Academy trainee, thereby benefiting the Southside Virginia community as a whole."

Microsoft is dedicated to helping the community surrounding its data centers. The Datacenter Academy Scholarship helps to increase diversity in the IT field by removing traditional barriers to education. In the fall, Microsoft will grant two diligent students the opportunity to experience a three-month paid internship at the Boydton facility.