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LP County Teachers Gain Skills at Summer Tech Conference

Educators from all across La Porte County got a high quality opportunity to learn how to integrate technology and computer science into their classroom. The Unity Foundation coordinated this first ever event so teachers could be close to home and attend for free. The Summer Teacher Tech Conference was held at Purdue University Northwest Westville campus on July 30 & 31 and featured knowledgeable, interactive sessions.

Local educators, Nextech, Edge Factor, and La Porte County Public Library provided concurrent training sessions with hands-on materials, while representatives from Sullair, Arconic, and Ivy Tech shared the types of jobs that coding skills are valuable for. Sullair's HR manager Kelly Molchan surprised conference attendees with a truckload of school supplies donated by Sullair's employees! This further reminded educators of how much La Porte County cares and helped them prepare for students that come to school without the necessary tools. Teachers also had the chance to win over \$4,000 in coding materials for the classroom and received attendance gifts including reading glasses from Peepers in Michigan City. Peepers supports teachers throughout the year through their Peepers for Teachers program and other events.

In December 2019, more than 12,000 students throughout LP County public schools participated in the Hour of Code in a county-wide effort coordinated by Unity Foundation and La Porte County Public Library, and supported by the school corporations. After this successful event, teachers asked for training in incorporating coding activities into their daily lessons. They know that coding teaches problem solving, communication & how things work. They want our County's kids to have an advantage when they graduate – and these skills can provide that! In

response, Unity Foundation worked with other local organizations to coordinate a Summer Technology Training Conference for local educators.

The La Porte County Public Library, Purdue Northwest, and the Skill Up Network immediately jumped on board to sponsor this important event along with Unity. Earlier this week, more than 80 educators attended the free training on their own time to bring new ideas to their classrooms. On July 30, Maggi Spartz, Unity President, kicked off the conference by saying, "Unity saw an opportunity to support teachers even more with a local, free and high quality summer learning event. We love our teachers and want them to feel supported." Purdue University Northwest's Richard Rupp, welcomed the teachers to the PNW Dworkin Center, while commending their commitment to ongoing learning. Blair Milo, Indiana's first Secretary for Career Connections and Talent, was the keynote speaker. She reminded the group how important this type of training is and how glad she was that they were attending. The group was motivated by her reminder that statistics show that 85% of today's kindergarteners will end up doing jobs that do not even exist today. Automation makes way for new jobs - and we want our students ready for them!

Maggi Spartz, President of Unity Foundation said, "Through the work of Chairperson Linda Wiltfong and the planning committee, local educators are heading back to school with new knowledge, additional motivation to implement the Department of Education's computer science standards, and even some school supplies for their classrooms or students! We are proud to be part of the community lifting up teachers and showing appreciation for their important work."

Post-event surveys indicated great satisfaction with the knowledge gained, as evidenced by this quote from a teacher, "I really enjoyed getting to experience the kits that are coming to our schools. It allowed me to gain insight and information into how to use these devices with my students."

Another attendee said, "I think it was great that this was free to educators in our community. Hopefully more people will take advantage of this."

One teacher was most excited about connecting with other La Porte County educators, "This was a great opportunity to collaborate with other schools."

The collaboration amongst school corporations and the outstanding presentations by local educators have created relationships and contacts that all of those involved hope will continue into the school year. They are thrilled that so many teachers took their own time to gain new knowledge to take into their classrooms this fall!

More photos from the 2 day event can be found on Unity Foundation's Facebook page.

Since 1992, Unity Foundation of La Porte County has served donors, nonprofits and local communities. As La Porte County's community foundation, it manages approximately \$32 million in assets, administers more than 325 charitable funds, and has distributed approximately \$19 million through direct grants and scholarships. The Council on Foundations has deemed Unity Foundation in compliance with all Indiana and national ethical and operating standards for community foundations.

Unity Foundation's mission is to strengthen La Porte County now and forever by building permanent endowments; providing leadership; offering philanthropic vehicles for everyone; and, being a catalyst for social and economic vitality. For more information, please visit www.uflc.net or call 219-879-0327.



La Porte County Library staff display classroom kits available to La Porte County teachers.



Kelly Molchan of Sullair and Linda Wiltfong of Unity Foundation pose with school supplies donated by Sullair employees



La Porte County teachers take part in Next Tech training during day 2 of the Summer Technology Training Conference