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Riverside grad helps implement technology program

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NORTH SEWICKLEY TWP. - A Riverside High School graduate is looking to give back to the community by helping implement a technology program and establish a college scholarship.

Kasey Turner, a 1999 Riverside graduate, as well as Justin Bonner, a 1996 graduate of Hickory High School in Hermitage, spoke to Riverside students Tuesday afternoon about the innovative program, which will begin during the next school year.

A \$2,500 scholarship will be presented to a June 2010 graduate of Riverside to kick off the program. A similar program is now in its fourth year at Hickory High School, and Bonner said the first scholarship recipient from there is poised to receive a degree from Columbia University this spring. Scholarships for Riverside and Hickory will be awarded through the Shenango Valley Foundation, Bonner said.

Turner, whose parents are Ken and Pam Turner of Franklin Township, has a bachelor's degree in computer engineering from the University of Pittsburgh and a master's degree from John Hopkins University in Baltimore.

Bonner, however, took a more "nontraditional" approach to his education, being self-taught and working within the field. He is now vice president and managing partner at Norseman Defense Technologies in Elkridge, Md.

The men, who both work in the Washington, D.C., area, met in Maryland and shared their vision of providing technology education to students from their hometowns in order to keep and retain high-paying jobs within those communities.

Turner, a vice president for Vulnerability Research Labs in Columbia, Md., worked in the intelligence community before taking a position with the firm.

He sees the Riverside area as "a great place to grow up."

"I left the area for a job, but that is not necessarily the way it has to be," Turner said while speaking at Monday's Riverside School Board meeting.

The program suggested by Turner and Bonner will immerse students in computer science and technology.

Turner helped set up the school district's first Web site in 1997-98 and would like to see the technology curriculum at Riverside grow. Planning for the Riverside program began in November and will focus on what students would like to gain through the program, which Michael Leitner, Riverside High School principal, describes as a "technology academy" and "a school within a school."

The academy would allow technology students to take classes during the morning and then focus on core classes, such as English, social studies, science and mathematics, during the afternoon.

Classes will be taught by district teachers with the help of Turner and Bonner through a Polycom, an audio and video conferencing system, and Leitner is in conversations with the Community College of Beaver County and Carlow University to try to introduce college credits for the advanced work the students will be involved with.

The program will focus on basics as well as allow students to pursue areas of interest within the technology field.

One of the classes may have students build their own computers and then keep them.

One of the students who spoke with the men Tuesday, Jon Bucci, a Riverside senior, would like to have learned more about sound engineering, acoustics and audio mixing. Bucci also would like to see a more powerful computer lab that can run more advanced programs, especially ones that deal with "virtual machines."

Turner and Bonner challenged the students to come up with ideas for classes and even offered those who submitted the two best ideas each an iPod Touch, a handheld device that stores and plays music, movies, games, and other information.

Bonner also challenged the 20 students present to "go beyond the technology - there are no boundaries."

"This is a unique and wonderful opportunity," Leitera said, adding the program is "breaking the norm." He challenged the students to "be pioneers."

In addition to helping with job creation and job growth within the community, the program will allow the students the opportunity to be creative and innovative. Turner and Bonner also promised support, not only in the classroom, but with internships and guidance for those pursuing a career in technology.

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