Face Trackers

Assumption students win local hacking contest with new application

Archer Zhang, left, and Alessio Symons, both Grade 12 International Baccalaureate students, are shown here in an Assumption classroom. The pair won a hacking competition held on the weekend at Massey.

(Windsor, Ontario, March 2, 2016) – Don't call them hackers. Call them trackers.

Archer Zhang and Alessio Symons, both Grade 12 International Baccalaureate students at Assumption College Catholic High School, came away with first place honours at last weekend's first ever local high school "hackathon," held at Vincent Massey Secondary School.

The boys created an application called Face Tracker, which picks out and recognizes human faces from a video feed.

"It's an application that we built on an Open CV library," explained Zhang. "We accessed online video streams, and we used facial recognition software and put it into our own client to make it

compatible with the code we wrote. Basically it shows the user when a face is successfully recognized."

About 100 students from a half-dozen area high schools participated at the event where small groups armed with their laptops were tasked with developing a web application, video game or new software within 12 hours.

The event's title may be something of a misnomer to some. Rather than breaking into computer systems, the contest is really about learning technologies and boosting computer skills.

Symons said the application they created would be especially useful in the security and robotics industries.

"It's a learning process, and basically a demonstration of what we're capable of doing," he said. "There's a lot of opportunity to develop this into a real world application."

Winning at the host school was especially rewarding, said Zhang.

"It's pretty hard to believe," he said. "They have such a strong computer science program there."

Ironically enough, the boys' victory came just days after the WECDSB made an announcement about plans to expand its computer coding and application curriculum at Assumption for the second semester of the 2016-17 year.

"Expanding coding and app development will add another element for students in such areas as robotics so they'll be able to see the big picture of how leading-edge technology is driving the manufacturing industry, but also just how many high-tech employment opportunities exist in the sector that they might not have considered," said Board Chair Barbara Holland.

By winning the local contest, the boys have gained acceptance in to Hack the North, an annual competition held at the University of Waterloo, and at TechRetreat, which brings together high school students for a one-day event held in the heart of Canada's technology hub.

Both students are applying to computer science programs at universities across Ontario.