



MEDIA RELEASE
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919 N Broad Street • Brooksville, FL 34601

HHS students raise funds while hacking computers

Brooksville – Students in Hernando High School's Academy of Computer Science and Cybersecurity had a phenomenal day of hacking computers and raising money for charity. On Nov. 9, 16 cybersecurity students participated in "Hacking for Hope" – an event aimed at finding "vulnerability flags" in computer systems – and raise more than \$1,000 for Give Kids the World charity! Cybersecurity teacher Mason Lewis organized the event to serve as both a fundraiser for the nonprofit charity as well as a great opportunity for his students to practice their ethical hacking skills.

"I modeled this fundraiser after Relay for Life, where donors can give flat donations or a donation based on how many flags were captured," Mr. Lewis said. He said the students who participated in the 4-hour event worked on several objectives, using their skills to get information such as passwords, usernames and IP addresses. "It's all based around cybersecurity," he said.

Give Kids the World is an 89-acre nonprofit resort in Kissimmee that provides weeklong, cost-free vacations to critically-ill children and their families from around the world. It has 166 villa accommodations, a variety of entertainment attractions, venues and fun activities. Mr. Lewis said he learned about the charity when he and his family visited the village a few years ago. "What they're doing is impactful," he said.

After Mr. Lewis was named Hernando County Teacher of the Year in 2021, he attended a roundtable with teachers throughout the state, where an instructor from Seminole County discussed how he used gaming as a fundraiser to help his students hone their skills while raising funds for charity. "I thought it was a really good idea," Mr. Lewis said. After his students got a few competitive events under their belt at the statewide CyberLaunch! (commonly referred to as "Hack-a-Thon") held each March, Mr. Lewis felt he and his students were ready for this benefit event. (He had students place second at the 2023 Hack-a-Thon and third in 2024). "This year was the right opportunity to do this," he said. "We were ready."

"It was awesome and fun. It was slightly competitive, but more of a learning experience before the Hack-a-Thon coming up in March," said Hannah Pearson, who is a senior and president of the Hernando Ethical Hacking Club at the school. "Our goal as a club was to raise \$500, but we went well over that! And the charity we helped is so cool!" Hannah also said more of the cybersecurity students are actively participating in the events and the hacking club this school year, and she is feeling confident about the upcoming statewide competition in March.

"It's kids helping kids," Mr. Lewis said. "The students really enjoyed it. Unlike the Hack-a-Thon, this really wasn't competitive. So they were helping each other. And this way, everybody wins!"

Lewis said they have kept the donation site open to help Give Kids the World. Donations can be made at:

<https://give.gktw.org/campaign/635497/donate>

To learn more about the charity, visit their website at: <https://www.gktw.org/>

