

# Youth summit kicks off new computer initiative

The Sentinel-Record · 4 May 2017 · GRACE BROWN

The Arkansas Martin Luther King Jr. Commission and Arkansas Department of Human Services joined forces Tuesday at the Webb Community Center to kick off a statewide initiative promoting computer science skills in local youths, along with the core principles that King built his life around.



Garland County was the first stop for the “nonviolent youth summits” with students from Mountain Pine, Hot Springs Intermediate and Hot Springs Community Schools in attendance.

According to the commission, the summits are designed to encourage youths 10 to 18 years old to engage in positive leadership development, and assume leadership roles within their communities.

The Arkansas Martin Luther King Jr. Commission has aligned with Gov. Asa Hutchinson’s commitment to bring computer science classes to each high school in the state. The state’s goal is to have 6,000 students enrolled in computer science courses, and 5,500 students have already signed up, according to the commission.

“The workforce in Arkansas is changing rapidly, so it is important for these kids to have this knowledge,” said Ben Gilmore, field representative and constituent service representative for U.S. Rep. Bruce Westerman, R-District 4.

Students in attendance watched a special demonstration by ATC Martial Arts of Little Rock, listened to speeches from noted Arkansas officials, including Hot Springs Mayor Pat McCabe, and learned about coding and its applicability in the future. Special time was

also set aside to talk about, and break down, the similarities between math coding and computer coding.

The summit also featured breakout sessions on computer science and coding, led by profes-

sionals in the industry from across the state, where students were given the opportunity to ask questions.

In order to give students a hands-on opportunity to learn about coding, the state started a “Congressional App Challenge” in 2015. This challenge is available to U.S. high school students of all skill levels. They must create a functional app, and present it in a demonstration video.

“This is a way to encourage students how to develop knowledge about computer science,” said Gilmore.

The Arkansas Martin Luther King Jr. Commission’s goal is to “promote racial harmony, multi-cultural diversity, and social equality” through community involvement, said Executive Director DuShun Scarbrough.

“We’re trying to establish within the community ways to bring (it) together, by way of kids getting involved,” said Scarbrough.

Everything the commission does incorporates King’s teachings, he said. Nonviolence is the basis of these summits, and the commission seeks to teach today’s youths the important role nonviolent opposition to inequality has throughout history.

“I think we have a bright future for Arkansans,” McCabe said. “We employ people every day that must have a firm grasp on technology, so learning this higher level of technology will benefit Arkansans in the future.”