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Free 'Northland Hackathon' April 9 for high school students curious about building cool apps and having fun with computer science

staff reports pilotnews@pilotindependent.com

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DULUTH — Whoever thought non-fungible tokens (NFTs), cool websites, sweet apps and cybersecurity would be mentioned in the same sentence as computer science?

A guy from Cloquet who focused on computer science (at Harvard, no less) and was named one of Fortune magazine's "30 Under 30" honorees, that's who. Because Luke Heine, 27, knows computer science is the foundation for all kinds of cool innovation.

And he's going to introduce area high school students to it during the first-ever Northland Hackathon, a virtual, free event from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, April 9. A hackathon is a free-flowing event at which computer programmers and those with similar interests collaborate on exploring possibilities, with the goal being to have working software or hardware by the end of the day.

"A hackathon is a digital form of building things with Legos, only more fun!" said Heine. "We're going to be making things up as we go along on April 9, so the more creative participation we have, the better. You don't have to be a website guru to join us. You just have to want to explore all the cool things associated with computer science. There's no cost, so you have nothing to lose."

While the Northland Hackathon is indeed free and a virtual event, Heine said there will still be a cap on attendance so participants have the best opportunities for interaction. He encourages people to register for the event now at

NorthlandHackathon.com. Those registered will be sent materials before the event so that everyone is ready to start hacking at 10 a.m. April 9.

“All these resources we’re providing are free and they’re what the pros use,” said Heine. “You’ll just get them years in advance. They’re what we wished we had discovered when we were starting out.”

Heine said the event will follow the definition of a hackathon, too. After an introductory period, participants will work in teams to build their creations and then make presentations to the other teams by the end of the day.

Patty Salo Downs, Executive Director of the Marshall H. and Nellie Alworth Memorial Fund, said Heine is a shining example of the kind of STEM students to which the Alworth Fund provides scholarships.

“Luke realized early on that STEM careers are a lot a fun, and he’s going to great lengths with the Northland Hackathon to expose many others to its endless possibilities,” said Salo Downs. “There are a lot of kids in the Northland as creative as Luke is. Who knows? Maybe the next area’s next STEM star will be part of the hackathon!”

The Marshall H. and Nellie Alworth Memorial Fund awards scholarships to students with interests in pursuing a bachelor’s degree in mathematics or scientific fields of study. The Fund is available to students in 60 high schools, plus those who are home schooled, who live in these 10 northern Minnesota counties: Aitkin, Beltrami, Carlton, Cass, Cook, Crow Wing, Lake, Itasca, Koochiching and St. Louis. Since its establishment in 1949, the Fund has distributed \$52 million among 5,200 motivated young people.