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# Santa Cruz teenagers ready to take tech industry by storm

Four 15-year-olds pitch software company

By **JOEL HERSCH**

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SANTA CRUZ — Raphie Palefsky-Smith, a student at the Georgiana Bruce Kirby prep school in Santa Cruz, pitched the software company he and three of his friends created.

“It’s called Codulous,” he said.

With the support of the Palo Alto company, Teens in Tech, the four friends, all 15 years old and from Santa Cruz, have spent the past two months developing their start-up company’s product that allows users to access and manage programming code from any location using a Web browser, Palefsky-Smith said.

The Teens in Tech program is an incubator for technical start-up companies created by teens, Palefsky-Smith said. The program provides young entrepreneurs with mentors, advice, work space and help in establishing them in the tech industry.

The four tech-savvy students’ start-up, as well as five other start-ups created by teens from around the



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**Raphie Palefsky-Smith and friends are developing software and a business model for Codulous.**

Bay Area, ages 15 to 19, officially launched their companies publicly on Friday at the Teens in Tech conference at the Palo Alto Research Co. — ground zero of the Silicon Valley entrepreneurial scene.

Codulous makes it possible for users to “code on the go,” Palefsky-Smith said in a phone interview. “This is our time to showcase what we’re doing and get people excited.”

Palefsky-Smith, Kai Tamkun and Andrew Amis, all students at the Kirby prep school,

came up with their idea for Codulous because they each had code on their home computers that they wanted to work with while at school, but the school wouldn’t allow them to install the necessary code editing programs on school computers, he said.

“It was a problem, so we said, ‘Hey, why not put the programs on a website so we can just open a Web browser, go to the site and start editing code,’” Palefsky-Smith said.

Once the three of them got the ball rolling they partnered with 15-year-old Marc Laugharn, a student at Pacific Collegiate School in Santa Cruz, to do the Web design for the site, he said.

“Kai and Andrew are the brains behind all the coding,” Palefsky-Smith said. “I handle the business and marketing end of the company.”

Both Kai Tamkun and Andrew Amis have been programming since they were about 10 years old, Palefsky-Smith said.

“They both know a ton of languages,” he said, referring to coding programs: Java, Python, Ruby and HTML.

“They’re very experienced,” he said.

As an experiment, the Codulous team timed how long it takes traditional code-editing

programs to download, the method they would have used if the school had allowed it, and found it was about 10 minutes, Palefsky-Smith said.

“Way too long,” he said. “We think that’s just ridiculous. With Codulous, all you have to do is log-in and click a few buttons.”

For the past six weeks, the four team members have been car pooling to Mountain View where they work in the office of the Teens in Tech sponsor, Appcelerator, to develop their software and company model, Palefsky-Smith said.

With guidance and input from Teens in Tech mentors they’ve been able to troubleshoot coding issues and data bases and exchange ideas about how to adapt and improve their company, he said.

Palefsky-Smith said the team isn’t sure how they’ll proceed with Codulous yet. They haven’t decided if it’s something they want to manage or sell.

Palefsky-Smith said he’s not sure yet what he wants to do after high school either.

“I’m kind of torn between getting educated in technology or business because I’m interested in both,” Palefsky-Smith said, “but that’s what draws me to start-ups. It’s a perfect blend.”