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TechStar Tutors connects college kids with seniors

By Rich Griset

STAFF WRITER

**TechStar Tutors’ Carter Glotz helps Ann Cheatham, 83, navigate a cellphone at her home in Salisbury. Ash Daniel/Chesterfield Observer**

Last summer didn’t get off to a great start for Carter Glotz.

Just before finishing up his freshman year at Virginia Tech, he’d torn his ACL playing football with friends, meaning he’d probably look forward to a jobless summer where he couldn’t do much but sit around.

“I couldn’t really get a normal job,” recalls Glotz, now 21. After coming home, he noticed that his grandmother was using a notebook for her contacts instead of storing them on her phone. When he asked why she didn’t just keep the numbers on her phone, she responded that she didn’t know how.

Soon he was visiting his grandparents every week, showing them how to use a smartphone, iPad and computer. They paid him for his time, which gave Glotz an idea.

“That allowed me to see there’s a huge market out there for this type of product or service, and that college students are the perfect group to act as tutors,” he says.

Soon, TechStar Tutors was born, a business that pairs older clients with paid college-age tutors. According to Glotz, a rising junior who’s studying communications and business, it’s a win-win for all involved.

“It benefits the older folks because it helps them bridge the technology gap between generations,” Glotz says. “For college students, it provides a resume-worthy job that also offers them good pay and gives them great customer service experience, and great intergenerational experience, working with groups that they usually don’t focus on in other jobs.”

So far, clients have mainly requested help learning how to use laptops and smartphones. Though most of his clients have been women in their 70s, Glotz says his company has served customers in their 40s and 80s.

One such client is 83-year-old Ann Cheatham of Salisbury. She’s had four sessions so far, learning how to use her laptop, Google, email, Facebook, YouTube and Netflix.

“It’s good. I have a lot of friends who go on Facebook, and I never have been able to, so I enjoy that,” says Cheatham, adding that she’s owned a computer for years. “You know, a computer doesn’t come with an instruction book.”

When she opened her email after setting it up years ago, Cheatham had nearly 800 unread emails. Glotz helped her get it down to a more manageable size. Now she’s paying bills and handling her banking online, and plans to learn how to use her cellphone and Nook tablet next.

“He’s very savvy on all of it, and he’s very patient for me and writes notes as well,” says Cheatham of Glotz.

With some help from family and friends, Glotz started his business last year, and recently launched a website. TechStar currently has seven tutors on staff and is looking for more.

So far, the company is mainly comprised of friends and family, including Glotz’ parents. Tammy Glotz, Glotz’ mother and TechStar’s head of communications, says her mother-in-law’s friends were jealous of her newfound tech skills.

“Sometimes it helps to put a college student with a parent because you don’t have the patience to work with them,” Tammy Glotz says, adding that seniors aren’t the only target for the company’s services. “I have friends in their 50s who don’t know how to use social media.”

So far, prices run from $39.99 for one hour to $99.99 for three hours, and there are different rates for group sessions. Tammy Glotz says that some retirement homes have expressed interest in bringing in TechStar tutors to hold classes. She points out that all tutors go through a two-hour training session and undergo a background check.

Looking ahead, there are plans to expand TechStar to Denver and Boulder, Colorado, as well as the Blacksburg area when Carter Glotz returns to school in the fall. The hope is that one day Tech- Star will be a nationwide service, and that through its website, clients will be able to pay for online lessons.

Of showing older folks the technology ropes, Glotz is upbeat.

“It really helps them live healthier, happier lives,” he says.