



TECH IT EASY

TECH SAVVY STUDENTS AT CANBERRA GRAMMAR SCHOOL GET WITH THE PROGRAMS IN SAN FRANCISCO.

BY DARIA KURILO

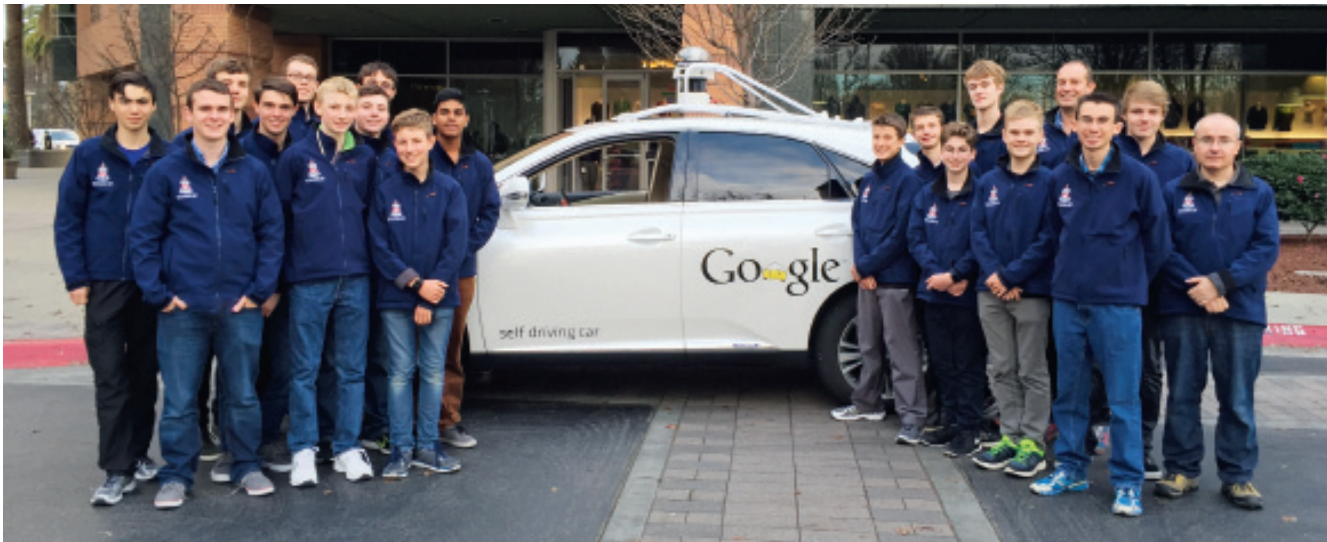
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

Best friends Damian Camilleri (left) and Jaxon Kneipp at Apple headquarters in San Francisco; Canberra Grammar students next to a Google car during the San Francisco and Silicon Valley tour; Damian and Jaxon at the WWDC orientation; Silicon Valley tour participants liked their visit to Facebook's head office.

Hours of work, planning and writing apps paid off instantly when a duo from Canberra Grammar School opened the email that said they'd won a scholarship to attend the Apple Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC) in San Francisco. This is how the Canberra Grammar School's year 10 students, Jaxon Kneipp and Damian Camilleri, found themselves in the audience listening to some of the most influential developers at one of the most prestigious conferences in the world. They used to watch the annual event online back home in Canberra but never thought they would have the opportunity to fly across the world and be a part of such a significant experience.

For best friends Jaxon and Damian it all began when they joined the Junior Code Cadets in year seven. The program was established in 2011 by Head of Digital Innovation and Canberra Grammar graduate Matthew Purcell. Initially it started as an after-school optional activity for boys wanting to learn how to code programs but when Dr Justin Garrick became the new headmaster, he asked Matthew if he could oversee it full time.

"It became quite popular and our head of school liked what we were doing so he asked if I wanted to extend the program," Matthew explains. "That's when we started our year nine and 10 courses. We now offer three afternoons a week for years seven and eight, with roughly 20 students per session. It's great for the students and I think it's a



learning opportunity that can take them places in the future.”

The all-boys school, which was established in 1929, has more than 1500 students enrolled from pre-kindergarten to year 12. The boarding facilities have recently had a \$1.3 million renovation, offering flexible as well as traditional term boarding for years seven to 12. The school has a strong co-curricular program in sports, creative and performing arts, outdoor education, exchanges and, of course, computing.

Prior to Code Cadets, Jaxon had never thought about programming or software engineering, only knowing the fundamentals of Microsoft Office. “Before year seven I never really had any exposure to computers,” he says. “But during one of the assembly talks a student from Code Cadets was talking about how he went on a trip overseas. It sounded amazing so a group of friends and I decided to join.”

What started as a fun after-school activity turned into a passion and, since joining, both Jaxon and Damian have entered and won several competitions including Young ICT Explorers, GovHack and Hackathon ACT. Last year the pair started to teach themselves Swift, a programming language for macOS, iOS, watchOS and tvOS with the ambition to be accepted for this year’s WWDC scholarship. They created custom apps about themselves, similar to an interactive

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resume, impressing both their scholarship managers and their teachers. They were the only two students from the program to be accepted.

“We worked on the app for WWDC for a long time — weeks and months,” Jaxon says. “Once I saw the email about being accepted it was so exciting as only 350 scholarships are offered in the world. Everyone gathers at the conference. I always used to watch the event online and I never thought that one day I’d be there. It was great to meet the senior executives of the products and software such as iPhones and iPads that we use every day. The whole experience was mind-blowing. When I walked into Apple headquarters I was absolutely amazed.”

Code Cadets also offers a rare chance to go on a San 



TOP TO BOTTOM:

Jaxon and Damian learning to control drones through programming; students with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull at the International Computer Science Education Week.

Francisco and Silicon Valley tour for two weeks, providing students with exclusive access to many of the world's large and well-known technology companies. As far as they are aware, Canberra Grammar is the only school in Australia that offers this privileged opportunity. During the most recent trip in January 2015 the students visited 18 corporations including Apple, eBay, Facebook and Google.

"Our core mission is to have up-to-date offerings,"

Matthew says. "We keep an eye on the industry, see how it's changing and then apply that to our program to keep the course contemporary and relevant. We are always looking for opportunities and are always thinking how we can engage the students with real companies, events and conferences in order to keep those connections alive."

Last year the Canberra Grammar School made the decision to go fully co-educational, from pre-school to year 12. "We're really excited to have girl students from next year," Matthew says. "Many girls have shown particular interest to go to Canberra Grammar School because of Code Cadets. I think it would be great to have girls join the program because it is a predominantly male-dominated industry."

At the moment Jaxon and Damian are working on their next project for Young ICT Explorer 2016, and while they have worked many years together Jaxon hopes nothing changes after graduating. "I definitely hope we continue collaborating," he says. "We've won awards and were a part of the Hackathon competition. We've developed apps together as well."

Jaxon is currently working on his first game app as part of an assignment but he's also planning on uploading it on to the App Store, where his other apps have been quite successful. In terms of his future, a career in computing is definitely on the cards. "Canberra Grammar School has opened my eyes to the possibilities outside of school," he says. "I don't have any specific corporations in mind at the moment. I'm happy to go along, get experience and see what comes up. I want to do a commerce and software engineering degree as I think that's a powerful combo." *AC*

