IMPACT student builds mobile app

A New Year's resolution challenge from his English teacher spurred IMPACT High School senior and computer science enthusiast Donovan McCray into accomplishing a personal goal of building a mobile app. Merces is now available for download in the App store, and helps patrons accurately calculate a tip for service, whether it's at a restaurant or hair salon, or for pizza delivery, taxi service and more.

Donovan had toyed with the idea of developing an app of his own for some time. After school resumed in January, his teacher, Emily Patrick, told his class to write down three things they wanted to accomplish this year, and at the end of the semester they would see how many of their goals had been accomplished. Donovan went to work immediately, learning Apple's programming language via an online course and researching the best type of app to build for his first try.

"I knew I wanted to make something that would exist for actual use, and I also wanted to make something that would be convenient for Apple's new watch," Donovan said.

He relied on advice for first-time app builders to research existing apps and create something along the same lines, but better and with more functionality or other mobile-friendly features. While there are other tip calculator apps available, Donovan believed they were mostly built for class assignments or other projects, and decided he could create something better. It took him approximately four months to complete the app, which went live in April.

Originally, Donovan called his app "Tip of the Iceberg" but ultimately decided his product needed a more appealing moniker.

"I realized that what makes people want something is that it's considered a quality product," he said. "So I did some research and came up with 'Merces,' which is Latin in origin and means 'wages and rewards.'"

Merces users rely on the app to help calculate how much each member of the party should tip when splitting the bill, and determine an appropriate tip based on the quality or level of service received, among numerous other functions that often stump even the most mathematically advanced customers.

IMPACT High School senior, Donovan McCray, shows a screenshot of his tip calculator app, Merces. The app is now available for download in the App store, and helps patrons accurately calculate a tip for service, whether it's at a restaurant or hair salon, or for pizza delivery, taxi service and more.

As the app description reads, "Built with simplicity, speed and function in mind, Merces allows for the fastest and most precise calculation of any tip calculator on the app store."

Following graduation, Donovan plans to attend the University of Texas, initially in the School of Computer Engineering, but ultimately plans to study Computer Science and "build apps on the side."

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