Hack UCSC sold out; 350 hacking for good and for cash [Santa Cruz Sentinel, Calif.]

Jan. 10—SANTA CRUZ — More than 350 students from 16 schools converged at UC Santa Cruz on Friday afternoon to compete in the second campus hackathon and for $8,000 in prizes.

The Crown-Merrill Cultural Center, one of the largest venues on campus, hosted HACK UCSC, featuring the usual $1,000 fee, according to UCSC alum Mark Adams, hackathon emcee, thanking staff and Alien Bushnell.

The event reached capacity when 392 tickets were sold to participants and mentors.

New this year, participants can submit resumes Saturday to apply for local tech jobs and/or internships.

Two dozen sponsors came on board thanks to UCSC alum Doug Erickson, founder of the Santa Cruz New Tech MeetUp, while Brent Haddad, director of the UCSC Center for Entrepreneurship, gathered support from UCSC and Cabrillo College.

Organizers included UCSC students Anjal Karthik, Nacho Amah and Zinna Hamid and UCSC alum Janette Lang.

About 80 percent of participants are UCSC students, said Erickson, who was delighted to have representation from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Last year, 62 attended with fewer than 10 women participating. This year, all 60 of the women's size T-shirts were snatched up at check-in.

UCSC alum Jacob Martinez, founder of Digital NEST, is a startup in largely Latino Watsonville providing a safe place for young people to learn about technology, brought a team of five to brave the potentially intimidating environment. In two hours, the team found a couple of programmers to work on their app.

Neci Hogan, senior software engineer at Plantronics, came to pitch the PLT Legend, a wearable device with sensors for students to build an app, and to give away six headsets.

"Doug said there would be this many people but I didn't believe it," said Hogan, a UCSC alum.

Several of the nine nonprofits in the Tech Cars category sent representatives who are UCSC alumni, such as Amy Mascarenas, who heads El Pueblo Community Development Corp.'s incubator kitchen, San Halsey, who heads ONeill Sea Odyssey and Eloy Oriz of Watsonville TEC.

"If you deliver an app, I will get a basket of all the products from the kitchen and deliver it to you," Mascarenas said.

Tech Cars winners will be entered in the Crazes pitch contest in March.

Tech company Pebble, of Palo Alto, brought swag to woo participants. Driscoll's of Watsonville, a sponsor in the ag tech category, brought strawberries.

Marcelo Sierro came as a mentor. He plans to launch an incubator above business with Pleasure, his Scotts Valley business.

Pralate Ranade, who launched San Francisco-based Kmon Labs 51 weeks ago, urged students to use his web scraper for their projects.

"I'm excited to see what you guys make," he said.

Ideas pitched included an app such as Yop to find friends and relatives, an ag tech game where farmers deal with disasters and income taxes, and a lightweight communication device that a child with cerebral palsy could access with eyes or arms.

Amruta Deso, a UCSC sophomore who attended the weaklong Grace Hopper conference in Arizona for women in technology, came with two other women.

"We want to create an app to help you decide what to wear based on the weather," she said, wearing a summer top due to Friday's warm temperatures.

Cabrillo College sophomore William Rislow, of Scotts Valley, has a team of five working on an app to help community college students planning to transfer to a UC campus, something UC officials last year identified as an issue deserving more attention.

The top 10 teams will present to judges Sunday at an invitation-only dinner on campus.