

Take note, Apple & Dell: The Computer Whizzes of Armonk

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Most 14-year-old boys are playing with computers, but when **Greg Skloot** and **Jeremy Blum** were that age, they were fixing them and had started their own computer repair business.



Greg Skloot (left) and Jeremy Blum

Now 18, and seniors at Byram Hills High School, the good friends have turned that business into quite the success story. In addition to repairing computers, their Armonk-based *Computer Solutions* also offers website design. And they refurbish old computers and donate them to charity. A few years ago, they became two of the youngest people to ever take and pass the CompTIA A+ certification test, which made them certified professional computer technicians.

And to think this all started with a conversation on a bus.

"We were freshman in high school. Jeremy was working with a local computer technician and he needed more help, and one thing led to another and I ended up working with him," Greg explains. "We did that for five months, and at that point we decided to take it over and we became technicians." Adds Jeremy: "I knew a lot about computers already, but the guy we were working with taught us a great deal. Then he moved away and he told us to keep it up and try to make money off it because we were good at it. So we did."

At the time, the boys weren't close, but they have since become the best of friends. Sometimes, a successful business venture will do that.

Among the services they offer are computer tune-ups, installing upgrades, setting up businesses and homes with a computer network, and virtually handling any computer problem. Clients include many businesses and residents of Armonk and the surrounding Westchester areas.

Two years ago, the repair business added Armonk Web Solutions to the mix, which now takes up almost half of their time. Over the years they have designed websites for about 70 clients, including the Armonk Chamber of Commerce.

"Most of our business is from referrals," Greg says. "At first, it was hard. We had to overcome the fact that people look at you and ask why they should work with someone so young, especially when we were just starting. We really had to prove to them that we could deliver what they were looking for, as good or better than someone who's 40."

One of those clients is Armonk resident Roy Potter, who had the boys come in and fix a problem he was having with his laptop.

"They had done work at the magazine where my wife works and I had heard that they were great at what they did," says Potter. "They are terrific kids and they know what they're doing. They fixed something that I couldn't and saved me from some frustrating moments."

The teens charge a flat rate of \$60 an hour for in-home service. Anything done in-shop, which is usually more serious, is charged based on what has to be done. "In-shop" for the boys means the basement of their homes, where computer equipment, tools and file cabinets take up most of the space.

"I love what we do and I hope to keep doing it," says Jeremy. "The thing with computer repair is you never have the same issue twice. The computer is different, the way people use it is different. Problem solving is what I like."

School is very important to the boys who say they have always put their schoolwork first. Both have an eye towards college next fall. Jeremy plans to pursue mechanical engineering and computer science, while Greg is more interested in studying business, with the hope of growing the company.

"We're always looking for ways to grow," Greg says.

The refurbishing they do involves taking old computers and fixing them up so they can donate to people and businesses who can't afford systems.

"It's a community service donation program. We work through Neighbors Link in Mount Kisco and ended up being volunteer administrators for their centers," Greg explains. Neighbors Link is a center that provides services to Latino immigrants. The boys have repaired and replaced computers used in computer classes, donated computers to individual students, and set up a wired network throughout the center for use by staff members. "We set up the office and we help with whatever they need."

Working steadily for the past four years, the two friends have made some good money from their hard work. Both have saved for college but Jeremy recently also made a large purchase with some of the money he made. "I bought a car," he says. "I also have a hobby where I build computers and I recently bought the parts I needed to complete one that I've been working on."

To contact Armonk Computer Services or Armonk Web Solutions, visit armonkpc.com. As soon as school is over, one of the boys will give you a call.