



## Once Upon a Time at Fairyland

By C.J. Hirschfield



Photo by Ken Katz

Twenty-two youth graduated from the six-week Hack the Hood Boot Camp last week at Impact Hub in Oakland.

## Hacking—and Helping—the Hood

Last week I attended a graduation ceremony here in Oakland that celebrated the accomplishments of 22 young people from low-income backgrounds. All 22 had completed Hack the Hood's six-week boot-camp program in computer technology, where they'd also learned professional, leadership and life skills.

In many ways, it was a typical graduation ceremony, with food, music and hearty congratulations from family members and mentors.

But the young graduates weren't the only ones who'd been given an unusual opportunity from Hack the Hood. Also in the graduation audience were owners of small local businesses – grateful recipients of beautiful, mobile-friendly websites created by Hack the Hood interns at no cost to the businesses.

Here's how one of those partnership worked.

Ken Katz is well known to the Grand Lake/Lakeshore community, where he is volunteer coordinator of the popular Splash Pad Park and its unofficial publicist-in-chief. He's also associated with a fine

nonprofit called DonateOakland.org, whose mission is to “identify local nonprofits that are deserving of your support in the form of donations of tangible goods including clothing, books and household goods.”

Lacking a real budget, DonateOakland's first website was, in Ken's succinct description, “pitiful.” He had known just enough about the HTML programming language to get the site up and running. Then it languished for about a year – until Ken heard about Hack the Hood and its talented, eager interns.

Hack the Hood works mostly with for-profit small businesses, but it agreed to take on DonateOakland as a client. It paired the organization with a student (now a graduate), Nia Horn. Ken and Nia “met” over the phone to discuss the old site and Ken's goals for a redesigned site.

Nia took it from there, creating a new site that's visually compelling – there's a gorgeous shot of the Fox Theatre on the home page – and easy to navigate on any device, with clean graphics and a hip

feel. As a bonus, the site can now be easily updated by DonateOakland staffers who have minimal technical skills.

And did I mention that the new site didn't cost DonateOakland a dime? What's more, Weebly, a popular platform for website creation, is providing free web hosting as well.

When I ran into Ken at the graduation ceremony, he was happy to report that the new site has already started generating a steady stream of new users.

Splash Pad Park, where Ken spends much of his time, is the home of what is arguably Oakland's best farmers' market. Ken has not been shy about telling some of the market's longtime vendors about the Hack the Hood opportunity. Two of these small businesses, Ledesma Family Farms and Gascon Farms, are now on Hack the Hood's waiting list.

For Ken, the benefit goes beyond a free and beautiful new website. He's also pleased that Hack the Hood is providing a remarkable opportunity to our community's youth.

“If they can do websites, Facebook, Twitter, these are very marketable skills,” he told me. “It's a win-win-win—for everybody.”

“Everybody” includes Hack the Hood itself. Founded just two years ago, the organization has grown exponentially: this year, it will serve 10 times more youth than it did in 2013. Last year, Hack the Hood received a generous grant from Google; this year, it will expand its program to five new locations, partnering with East Oakland Youth Development Center and MetWest High School in Oakland; RYSE Youth Center in Richmond; the African American Art & Culture Complex in San Francisco; and the Boys and Girls Club of the Peninsula in East Palo Alto.

If you have a small business and want to know more about how Hack the Hood can help you get found online and look great on mobile devices, visit [hackthehood.org](http://hackthehood.org).

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