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PRESS RELEASE

6-30-25

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CyberPatriot Cyber Camp empowers next generation of digital defenders

PALM DESERT, Calif. – The Air & Space Forces Association (AFA) of Palm Springs, in collaboration with the California State University, San Bernardino Palm Desert Campus, hosted the inaugural CyberPatriot Cyber Camp, an interactive five-day event aimed at empowering local high school students with vital cybersecurity skills and igniting a passion for STEM careers.

Taking place from June 23-27, the AFA 2025 CyberPatriot Cyber Camp was a free, immersive learning experience designed to introduce students to the high-stakes, fast-paced world of

digital defense. Through engaging instruction, hands-on activities, and expert mentorship, the camp placed students on the frontlines of cyber education — where tomorrow's digital defenders begin their journey.

A dynamic team of experienced educators and cybersecurity professionals guided participants through the camp:

- Tony Della-Moretta, president, and Jim McFarlin, vice president of education, AFA Palm Springs, who initiated the education-community partnership positioning the Cyber Camp as a career steppingstone for tomorrow's cybersecurity leaders.
- Thomas Chapman, assistant professor of cybersecurity at the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus, brought academic insight and real-world experience. He was joined by two student officers from the Information and Security Club of the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus — Jose Ramirez, president, and Samuel Flores, treasurer — as well as Ashley Sanchez-Solis, an incoming student transferring to CSUSB from College of the Desert this fall, who all served as mentors to the campers.
- Dana Sanchez, named AFA California 2025 Teacher of the Year and an accomplished IT/Cybersecurity instructor at Coachella Valley High School, added her award-winning educational perspective to the camp's curriculum.

These students were not just participants — they were pioneers preparing to lead in an ever-evolving technological world.

Throughout the week, students:

- Dove into interactive lectures and state-of-the-art online learning modules.
- Completed hands-on cybersecurity exercises that challenged their critical thinking and technical prowess.
- Received a first-look introduction to the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in cybersecurity defense.
- Discovered academic and career pathways through CSUSB's cybersecurity programs at the Palm Desert Campus.
- Competed in a thrilling final competition to put their skills to the test and earned bragging rights as top cyber defenders.

"Our goal is to demystify cybersecurity and make it accessible," said Chapman. "By combining technical challenges with mentorship and real-world insight, we're giving students both the skills and the confidence to succeed in this field. They're not just learning cybersecurity — they're becoming tomorrow's digital defenders."

Della-Moretta added, "This isn't just a camp — it's a launching pad. It's about more than just technology — it's about opportunity. We're showing students that they have a place in the future of cybersecurity, and that their journey can start right here in the Coachella Valley."

The AFA CyberPatriot Cyber Camp is a whole-of-community event involving all three local school districts, private schools and the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus, and is supported by grants from the Palm Springs Air Museum, the Morongo Band of Mission Indians, and congressmen Raul Ruiz and Ken Calvert, both of whom had representatives address the students at the camp.

By inspiring curiosity, fostering critical skills and connecting students with experts, the AFA CyberPatriot Cyber Camp aims to equip young minds to defend tomorrow's digital frontier — starting today.

Visit the [Air & Space Forces Association's website](#) to learn more about their various Cyber Camps programs.

About the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus: The CSUSB Palm Desert Campus is dedicated to providing a transformative educational experience in the Coachella Valley. With a focus on academic excellence and community engagement, the campus offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs designed to meet the diverse needs of its students and the region.

For more information about the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus, contact Mike Singer in the Office of Marketing and Communications at msinger@csusb.edu or (760) 341-2883, ext. 78107, or visit the PDC website at www.csusb.edu/pdc.