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Talent search for future cyber pros includes Del.

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Delaware is one of six partners chosen to help beef up the nation's cyber security work force.

As part of the new U.S. Cyber Challenge, Delaware high school and college students can participate in competitions, attend camps and earn internships in which they will learn to analyze computer networks and secure them against hackers or other threats.

"What we're finding is that the [needed computer skills] are being developed anyway" among young people, said Elayne Starkey, chief security officer for the state and Delaware coordinator for the Cyber Challenge program.

"This is a program to try to channel them in positive ways instead of the more negative aspect of hacking," Starkey said. "We want them to be computer-savvy, but we want them to do it in a way that's helpful to our infrastructure and community and government as opposed to being a bad guy."

Cyber Challenge, a program of the nonprofit Center for Strategic and International Studies, is designed to encourage high school and college students to pursue science and math careers by teaching them how to protect computer networks and connecting the young people to colleges or employers where they can further develop or apply their skills.

Sen. Tom Carper, D-Del., announced Delaware's selection Monday. Other partners are New York, California, the SANS Institute, Department of Defense Cyber Crimes Center, and the Air Force Association.

Starkey said Delaware officials were approached by Cyber Challenge's organizers earlier this year about partnering in a pilot program to involve students in the effort's nationwide cyber security competitions and to create summer programs, scholarships and other opportunities in Delaware.

The University of Delaware and Wilmington University are developing summer programs, expected to begin in 2010, funded by Cyber Challenge.

"Everyone has cell phones, iPhones, Blackberries, and the security of those items is crucial," said Ed Guthrie, dean of the College of Technology at Wilmington University. "Everything we do as a society now is electronic, and we're tied to it and there are not enough people trained in that environment or with the skill set to deal with that. At this point, that is now being recognized as a critical area of need."

The programs target young people as they are deciding what careers to pursue.

"Those decisions are often made at a very early age, even before they would enter college, and we have many, many bright students that are just not choosing these fields today," said David Sincoskie,

professor of electrical and computer engineering at UD. “What we’re trying to do is reach down a little bit into the secondary system and turn kids on to both the opportunities and the challenges.”

The programs could help Delaware develop a talent pool and business opportunities in the cyber security industry, Sincoskie said.

“These are technology jobs, but they are interesting and exciting for the right kinds of people,” Sincoskie said. “It’s an untapped area for the state of Delaware; there’s not a large [information technology] industry in the state. Maryland has a large industry, New Jersey has a large industry and Delaware has a big opportunity.”
