

Kostian Iftica Sees a Brighter Future Through Technology

Tech Apprentice '06, UMass Boston '11, and founder of Brilliant Geeks

As a child growing up in Albania, Kostian Iftica loved to tinker with mechanical toys; once he turned a helicopter motor into a handheld fan. After moving with his family to the United States when he was 13 years old, Iftica found that his love of technology helped him assimilate to his new country. In Albania, he had never touched a computer or been online. But after using a computer at the Boston Public Library, he found himself drawn to them.

Computers helped Iftica adapt to a new language and culture. "Computers were only in English so essentially they forced me to learn English terminology I'd never seen before," he explains.

As a ninth grader at the John D. O'Bryant School of Mathematics and Science, he signed up for an after-school web-mastering class offered through Tech Boston. There, he learned about a new program called Tech Apprentice. Developed with input from Broadening Advanced Technological Education Connections (BATEC) at UMass Boston, Tech Apprentice connected him to a high-level, technology-related, paid apprenticeship.

Iftica was reluctant to join at first. "I wanted to do it but was afraid I didn't have the right skills," he says. However, Tech Boston's staff explained that the apprenticeship was a great opportunity to develop new skills. Convinced, he took a position at the New England Baptist Hospital.

Iftica was involved in a major project to digitize hospital medical records. He learned computer and hardware requirements for the transition and helped to set up servers and the network. At first he was intimidated by the project's complexity, but the support of his manager and mentor, Peter Lam, and the Tech Boston staff helped him excel.

The Tech Apprentice Program enhanced both his technical and interpersonal skills. As he continued to apply his skills to solving computer problems, he realized he was helping people. Iftica says that he "had the most fun interacting with the doctors and staff." He realized that technology needed to be user-friendly and accessible to people. If the technology was easy to use, it would help people become more efficient, more organized, and eliminate many mistakes caused by human error.

"It boosted my confidence because they valued my work, and it made me realize I had something to offer," says Iftica.

His new-found confidence helped him enormously as a UMass Boston major in management information systems (MIS) with a minor in



economics. As part of his capstone project, Iftica created a business plan for a technology consulting company; the idea of starting up a business was becoming a reality. He was connected to the university's Venture Development Center and the Massachusetts Small Business Development Center (MSBDC), where advisors helped him "visualize

the company's structure, income, and expenses," Iftica says.

"It was a great pleasure working with Kostian, who embodies all of the qualities needed to become a successful entrepreneur," says MSBDC Director Mark Allio. "He has a real passion for serving his clients and is very good at what he does. We will continue to support Kostian as Brilliant Geeks grows and prospers."

After graduating in 2011, Iftica chose to focus solely on Brilliant Geeks, rather than accept any of several job offers he had. Two years later, Brilliant Geeks serves more than 200 clients in Boston and states across the country. The company initially focused on residential clients and is now expanding into health care and other industries. Building a strong client base has been essential to Brilliant Geeks's growth, with word of mouth bringing in 90 percent of new business. This personal touch is perhaps what Iftica is most proud of.

"We are very honest with our clients, even if the truth hurts," he says. "Our vision is a brighter future through technology. At the end of the day, we are all human beings, not corporations, and we strive to make the world a better place by utilizing our skills."

Building the Next Generation of IT Leaders

Created at UMass Boston in 2003, Broadening Advanced Technological Education Connections (BATEC) envisions a seamless education-to-workforce pathway in IT that attracts, supports, and advances a diverse population of technology students. Promoting a collaborative approach, the center brings together leaders in education, industry, and the community to inform research, curriculum, professional development, and other initiatives that ensure innovative, relevant preparation of the next generation of leaders in technology fields.

BATEC has partnered with TechBoston, a department of the Boston Public Schools (BPS) that offers technology-related courses and opportunities district-wide, since 2005. The center advised TechBoston's development of the Tech Apprentice program, which has provided more than 600 BPS students with technology-focused internships, and works with TechBoston to provide training for BPS teachers.

Growth in Enrollment in BATEC-influenced Courses

Year	2007	2011	Percent Change
High Schools	1,215	1,837	51%
Community Colleges	3,225	5,803	80%
4-Year Colleges	47	441	838%