



Tech Thursdays on Friday...and Everyday

October 6, 2016 by [Shelley Stern Grach](#) · [Leave a comment](#)



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The past week was a busy one at [Malcolm X College](#), a beautiful new building for City Colleges of Chicago. The spectacular new physical space is a great meeting place for large groups and events, especially those focusing on building our neighborhoods and supporting youth and education programs.

On Wednesday, the [Starbucks Foundation 100K Opportunity Youth Program](#) was held at Malcolm X, with job opportunities and a career fair for over 500 of Chicago's young adults.



Microsoft is proud to support this program nationally, as well as to work locally with **Thrive Chicago**, one of the key nonprofits focused on “cradle to career” initiatives for youth. We also partnered with Thrive Chicago, providing 60 Surface devices for the attendees to build their resumes, look up job opportunities and respond to these opportunities.

On Thursday, the space had a decidedly different tone, as it was the stage for Mayor Emanuel’s speech and strategy to address public safety in Chicago. As one of the 300 invited guests, we listened to a **call to action** and collaborative efforts to build job skills, control gun violence, and improve economic development initiatives. Many of these initiatives were also focused on helping youth in underserved neighborhoods break the cycle of poverty and gang violence, and looked to the corporate community to step up its involvement with programs for digital skills, entrepreneurship and especially mentoring.

FREE resources 30 languages! Thanks [@MSFTChicago](#) [@shelleystern](#) for giving the community access to your amazing tools! [#TechThursdaysLive](#) pic.twitter.com/URLjWub9Su

— TechThursdaysChicago (@TechThursdays) **September 23, 2016**

Also on Thursday, the first day of **Tech Thursdays** was held. This is a great program which directly supports the life cycle of the two events above. Focused on community building and helping entrepreneurs get connected to resources and tools to build their businesses, run their businesses and incorporate the latest technology into their business plans and operations.



Many small business owners feel they have few resources to help them navigate the vast tech landscape, according to a 2014 study produced by Wakefield Research covering 500 small business owners with fewer than 100 employees. The study revealed that 64 percent of small business owners still feel “overwhelmed” when it comes to technology. In fact, many SMBs feel they have no one to turn to for tech guidance. The majority have no dedicated IT support. In fact, 59 percent of those surveyed said there are “insufficient resources” available in small business communities to help them (Samara Lynn, PC Magazine March 28, 2014). Locally, technology support is the third top-of-mind concern among small business owners in the Chicago region, according to a 2015 survey conducted by the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce and the Quinlan School of Business.

To address these problems, **Tech Thursdays Chicago**, Chicagoland’s free annual workshop and curriculum series, presents practical technology solutions that help business owners advertise, accelerate and manage the growth of their small businesses. Supported by an onsite assortment of small and large technology manufacturers, retailers, service providers and sponsors, Tech Thursdays Chicago is designed to offer the insight, instruction, samples, free trials and follow up support that owners and professionals want and need to grow their businesses.

Tech Thursdays 2016 Annual Conference is designed to introduce, discuss and resolve issues in small business management and growth through the presentation and exploration of practical technology-based tools and solutions.

Many workshops are designed to provide insight into the simple and more complex business technologies...one workshop at a time. Similarly, each year the workshop series expands upon the previous year's content, while introducing new areas of interest.



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This year, Microsoft was honored to support and directly participate in Tech Thursdays — both on Thursday and Friday! We had our representatives from the Microsoft Retail Store available to demonstrate devices and tools for small business. I participated in a workshop on Friday and discussed the importance of 21st century skills for both nonprofits (about 25% of the audience) and for the large number of small business owners. Focusing on the community and the candid conversations we need to have as #OneChicago, we discussed through Q&A the importance of all Chicagoans having access to the Internet and building up their digital skills early in school. Learning to compete in the global 21st century begins in elementary school and Chicago is a great place to do so, with the [CPS ComputerScience4 ALL program](#).

I'd like to congratulate the Tech Thursdays 2016 team: Rhea Steele, Brian Powers of Blue Ocean Logic, Tina James of Greater SW Development Corporation, and a host of other volunteers and business partners who made this important program possible. As I reflected on what the walls of Malcolm X College had seen and heard last week, I felt optimistic and hopeful—across Chicago there are a myriad of great programs and organizations, pitching in at all stages of our citizens' life cycle, to make Chicago stronger and resilient.