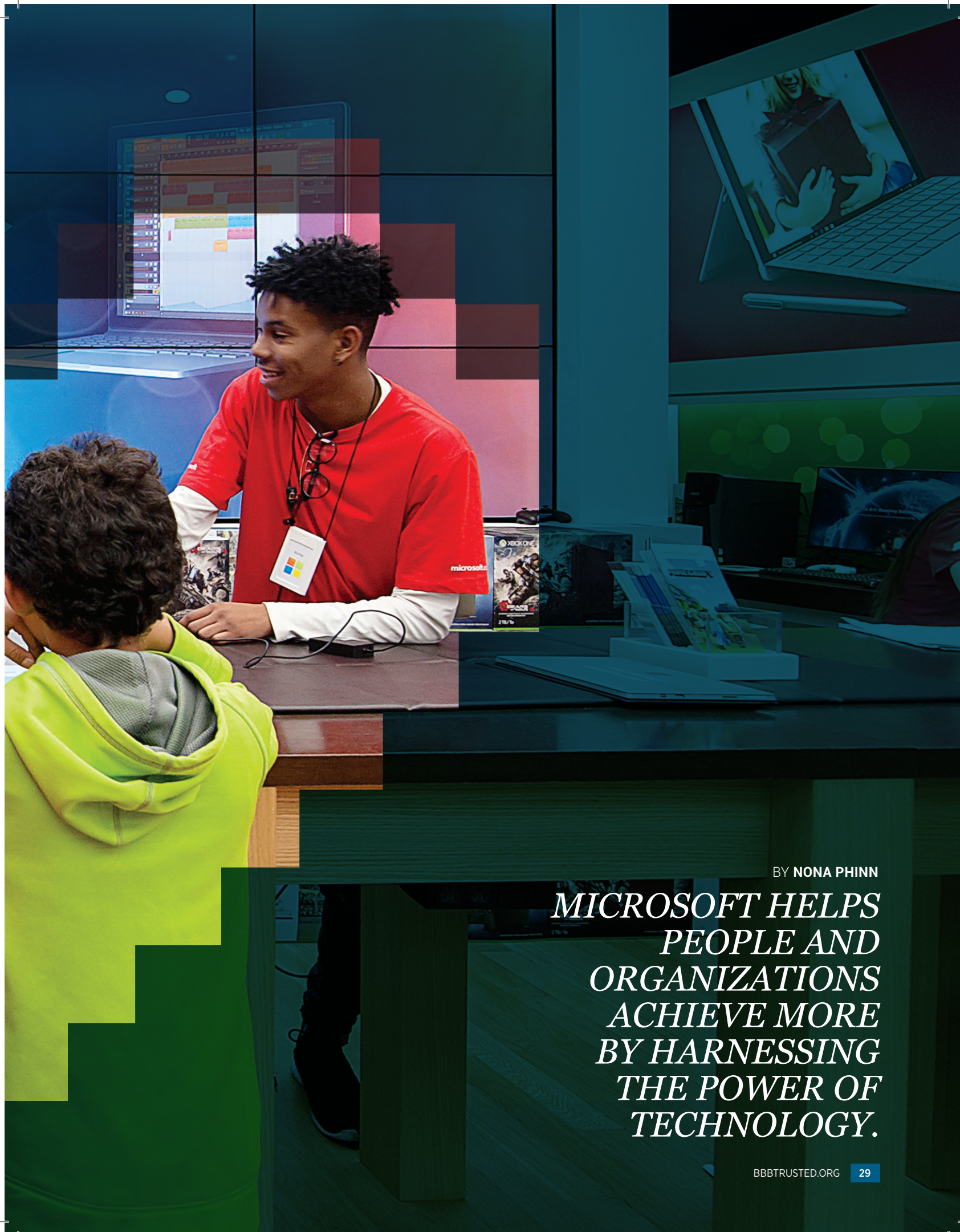


INSIDE THE HEART OF A TECH GIANT: CARING FOR COMMUNITIES





BY NONA PHINN

*MICROSOFT HELPS
PEOPLE AND
ORGANIZATIONS
ACHIEVE MORE
BY HARNESSING
THE POWER OF
TECHNOLOGY.*



I BELIEVE THAT EVERY INDIVIDUAL WALKING THIS PLANET HAS GREATNESS INSIDE.

We all were born with an ounce of potential meant to be used to change the world, our communities, our families, and even ourselves. We just have to take the time to discover the greatness within and be dedicated to identifying our gifts and our talents, which lead us to purpose. Our job is to never stop searching until we find it. The great news is that we don't have to rely only on ourselves to make this find.

The mission of Microsoft is "to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more." Microsoft believes in the power within each of us. This belief is so important to the company that it actively works to help and empower people to reach their potential and achieve their goals.

One of the many incredible ways Microsoft is helping individuals and

organizations discover their purpose and succeed is through its retail stores and the community development specialist (CDS) role. In every Microsoft Store across the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, and Australia, customers encounter the store's CDS. Since the company opened its first store in 2009, Microsoft has been dedicated to offering consumers not just a retail store, but a "retail experience" — a place where we can not only engage with the products but also experience them through play, creation, and experimentation.

Every Microsoft Store has a CDS to help bridge the gap between the community and the company. Customers might visit the store for a product, but the CDS is there to help us see beyond the product and experience Microsoft itself. Kelly Soligon, General Manager, Customer Engagement Marketing, Microsoft Store, described Microsoft Stores as a "physical manifestation of the Microsoft brand."

Through the CDS role, consumers are seeing the Microsoft mission and vision being put into action. We are watching the company walk the talk.

The sole responsibility of each CDS is to work with local communities to identify individuals and organizations that would most benefit from Microsoft's offerings and connect with them through organizing in-store events and activities, providing training and workshops, and working on-site with organizations to further their causes and fulfill their needs. The CDSs are Microsoft's boots on the ground helping the company be a resource in the communities in which it operates. They are empowered to craft programs tailored to their local communities. "No two CDSs' event calendars are the same because they have that ability to truly locally connect and build their programming," Soligon said.

Every CDS's calendar is different, but the common thread in all of them is that they're giving consumers the opportunity to see Microsoft's mission in action.

At the Microsoft Store in the Westfield Montgomery mall in Bethesda, Maryland, CDS Gilda Yang described her job as creating brand awareness for the store, which she mainly drives through consumer workshops.

THESE WORKSHOPS COVER TOPICS INCLUDING:

- How to use Windows 10
- Using Office applications
- How to build a resume using Word
- Budgeting in Excel
- How to code

In addition to workshops, Yang coordinates ventures to local schools to teach internet safety classes. She also helps her store colleagues find volunteering opportunities, hosts events with local nonprofits, and assisted with developing a curriculum to help local Girl Scouts earn their technology badges.

On top of supporting all these initiatives, Yang also works tirelessly to meet the needs of her local YMCA through a vital partnership created when her store first opened its doors and awarded a grant to the organization. Whenever a new Microsoft Store opens, the store gives grants to several local nonprofits. Recipient organizations use these grants to advance their technology. For the YMCA Bethesda-Chevy Chase, receiving the grant from the Westfield Montgomery Microsoft Store in 2014 created a partnership that began with Yang's staff visiting the YMCA facility to assist with raking leaves, cleaning up the outside of the building, and applying a fresh coat of paint.

Today, children at the YMCA Bethesda-Chevy Chase enjoy frequent invitations to the Westfield Montgomery Microsoft Store for its Hour of Code, a free event where a store staff member teaches children how to code through gaming. "I am a fan of this place. I love coming to code," an 11-year-old participant exclaimed.

"This is actually why this is my dream job," Yang said. "I get to meet new people, pay it forward every day, give back, change lives, and meet people who want to learn and experience new things."

The feeling is mutual in St. Louis. Trina Claggett is the CDS at the Saint Louis Galleria Microsoft Store, where her goal is to engage the local community and nonprofits to discover their true needs and connect them with all the resources available through Microsoft. Claggett has done just that with Notes For Life, a nonprofit that aims to empower students through a program that fuses music education with entrepreneurship and technology education. Children in the Notes For Life program meet with their instructors in her store's Community Theater, a space most Microsoft Stores offer for learning and outreach

events. Claggett also provides equipment and products that enable the children to learn through hands-on experience and by creating their own music.

Supporting an organization like Notes For Life was a must for Claggett. The organization's mission aligns with her own goal, as the Notes For Life program is free to students, the organization needed space to hold classes, and there





was a community need to give local children access to a music program. “Being relevant means meeting the need,” Claggett said. “We are here to empower nonprofits to do more.”

Claggett isn’t the only one who understands the power of being relevant. When hit with the news of the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, in 2015, Shy Averett, CDS at the Microsoft Store in the Somerset Collection mall in Troy, Michigan, immediately shifted gears to help. Canceling all other activities and workshops, Averett turned her store’s Community Theater into a water donation center. She sent a call-for-water email to her colleagues and kicked

off the collection with 20 cases of water. She felt it was the least she could do.

“Sometimes we think doing ‘more’ is doing that big thing, but when someone can’t drink water, then ‘more’ is access to water,” Averett said.

Her small effort made a big difference. In three days, Averett and her staff collected 15,000 bottles of water, which they gave directly to those in need. After seeing the devastation in Flint for herself, Averett pushed to help further. Her call for water reached Microsoft’s corporate office, and before long, seven other stores had combined forces to provide an additional 80,000 bottles of water for Flint residents. Even though it wasn’t the typical kind of community outreach for a technology company, the efforts of these eight stores showcase Microsoft’s mission in action. “That’s what makes me love this company even more,” Averett said. “Our theater is supposed to house the heart of our community program, and what greater picture of what our program is all about?”

The love doesn’t stop in Michigan. Nick Christine, CDS at the Microsoft Store in the Christiana Mall in Newark,

Delaware, shares the same sentiments as Averett. “I have the great fortune of giving Microsoft to the community,” he said. Christine works hand in hand with Junior Achievement (JA) of Delaware as part of a relationship that also began with a grant in 2013. JA is a nonprofit that teaches students in kindergarten through 12th grade how to prepare for success in a global economy.

In partnership with Christine’s Microsoft Store, JA’s Delaware branch developed the JA Company Program, which allows high school seniors to use Microsoft products to develop and launch their own businesses. Students who participate in this 13-week program work with JA instructors and Microsoft Store staff to perform cost-benefit analyses, create a marketing and product distribution plan, and brainstorm other activities to help bring their businesses to life. D2BU, which stands for “Dare to Be You,” was one of



the first companies birthed from the JA Company Program. The students behind the brand, which challenges us all to accept each other's differences and to be comfortable in our own skins, credit the Microsoft Store and JA with helping them learn more about their strengths and talents and find clarity about their future careers. With results like that, it is easy to understand why Christine said, "It's hard to have a bad day when my job is to give back."

Allison Knight is giving back in one of the biggest cities in the world. She is the CDS at the flagship Microsoft Store in New York City. In 2016, her store began a partnership with littleBits, a New York-based company that empowers people of any age, gender, or technological ability to create inventions using electronic building blocks that snap together with magnetics. The company offers a great alternative to help people engage in

science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) learning.

Giving youths access to technology education, programming, or organizations that offer STEM education opportunities is a vital initiative for Microsoft. The company believes that technology skills and careers are the future and wants to prepare children for success. This core belief is so significant to Microsoft that all its stores throughout the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, and Australia offer a range of coding programs, camps, and workshops for children as well as teachers, who can apply the curriculum in their classrooms.

Working together has been a win-win situation for Microsoft and littleBits. "Microsoft has a moral compass," said Ethan Tollin, Education Specialist for littleBits. "To be able to affiliate ourselves with that is an important and essential thing for littleBits."

Microsoft supports and empowers small businesses as well. Gregg Carline, the Business Sales Specialist at the Microsoft Store in the Westfield Garden State Plaza shopping mall in Paramus, New Jersey, works diligently to ensure that the community's small businesses know his store is there. He offers a weekly schedule of events that teach small businesses how to use technology to the fullest.

Lynda Brennan, Founder of Math4Minors and author of the *Math MileMarkers* children's book series, said she would not have gotten her small business off the ground without the help of her local Microsoft Store in the Westfield Garden State Plaza. She calls the team there her support staff.



MICROSOFT HAS A MORAL COMPASS."

Since she started her business in 2014, Brennan has leaned on the store's staff to help her use products, make wise technology purchasing decisions, and resolve technical issues. "Microsoft took away the anxiety of structuring all the technology components and allowed me to focus on my passion," Brennan said. "I am now in a place that I could only have dreamed of."

Everyone who walks through the doors of a Microsoft Store has direct access to the brand as well as access to all its services, offerings, and staff. "Our stores give Microsoft the ability to connect with customers one at a time," Soligon said. "We want to put our mission into action every day with every customer we interact with in the stores."

The message is clear: Microsoft wants to be a resource in the communities in which it operates. The company is there for each and every organization and individual that has a need and is beyond determined to meet that need. Microsoft is there for those who know that every moment is an opportunity to be, to do, and to achieve MORE. That includes you. ■

To find a Microsoft Store near you, visit microsoftstore.com/locations.

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