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The Unstoppable Rise of Tampa Devs

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It began as a small group of friends united by their shared love for dance. Soon after, it quickly became a thriving community of support and camaraderie for local developers.

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"A lot of the initial member base were line dancers that I met through dancing, and I found out they were actually software developers," says Vincent Tang, founder of the growing local developer community Tampa Devs.

> "So it was just this weird coincidence that people who like software development also like dancing."

Hey, devs need their social time too.

"We're talking to computers all day," Tang says. "And we don't have social interaction that frequently. We might have one meeting a day, and then we're just dealing with code or trying to debug something. It's like, man, I should probably go out and have some human interaction. So I thought, hey, why don't we just make this like a public group thing at the end of the day?"

So in September 2021, he founded the first official Tampa Devs Meetup, a space for experienced professional developers and beginners alike to learn, grow, and network.

Charlton Trezevant, vice president of Tampa Devs, shared Tang's vision for creating space for local partnerships and knowledge sharing. After returning to his hometown of Tampa, he was eager to find a community that shared his love for technology and entrepreneurship.

"I had just come back here from Orlando, and I was like, it's time to rebuild and start a new social circle and reconnect with my hometown and so on. I was trying to find just great venues for meeting people that were like me," Trezevant explains.

"You know, they're in technology. They're entrepreneurial. They like to learn and experiment and have this supportive community."

Trezevant's vision for a community was partly inspired by the positive impact he saw when he was part of the University of Central Florida's student-run cybersecurity club. There, he learned the importance of creating a space dedicated to skill-building and professional growth for all.

"It was an incredible opportunity for us to grow, advance our understanding, learn from each other, teach each other, and share knowledge," he explains. "That's a value that I hold very closely. I have always hoped to be able to contribute to building that kind of a community and that kind of a culture in places that I go to, so that was what I was looking for when I came to Tampa."

Initially, he considered starting his own cybersecurity-focused Meetup. But after attending his first Tampa Devs Meetup, he knew he'd found his niche.

"I was just super impressed."

So he teamed up with Tang, and the duo got to work thinking up all the ways they could take the Tampa Devs to the next level. They quickly learned they had an excellent collaborative dynamic.

"Probably better than I have had with most anybody," Trezevant says.

"We came to like a finished product that honestly would've taken like a team of people much longer since we were just on the same wavelength the entire time," Tang adds. "It was just a very unique experience...I almost call it like the dream level of collaboration."

But success didn't exactly happen overnight. Early on, they faced what Tang calls the "chicken and egg" dilemma.

"Obviously, members that want to go to tech events, particularly to learn about new topics, they wanna see a speaker, food, et cetera," Tang says.

"That's usually the basis of a lot of these arrangements. And then the speaker wants to know that there's gonna be people there. So you've got all these like chicken and egg problems. So in the first few months, I just threw up a Meetup event, and I'm like, okay, you know what they say in the old adage of startups, you fake it till you make it."

They bootstrapped their way along, raising money here and there, even investing personal resources where needed. There were countless late nights spent working out details on slide decks and racing to tie up last-minute loose ends.

> "Throughout most of the early history of Tampa Devs, it was like us against the world basically," Trezevant remembers.

"You know, we were going out, we're putting up posters, giving out stickers to random people, sending cold emails, doing cold calling, just like trying to create a perception of being a legitimate organization."

Eventually, all that grassroots work came together, and Tampa Devs started to take off. Last year, they hosted a wildly successful Hackathon that turned out to be one of the most memorable events to date.

> "We had 12 different teams of people all making different projects, and we gave out a total of $1,500 in prizes or so. And it was really cool."

The event, hosted at Embarc Collective, had about 120 attendees.

"Vincent and I did all of this work ramping up to the event. There were a lot of late nights figuring things out, like, 'we gotta redesign this banner now.' Or like, 'okay, I have to spend a week figuring out who can print these different large promotional materials and do all this different cost analysis,' or like, 'ah, let's go write this FAQ because we don't have an FAQ.' It was a ton of prep work over three to six months leading up to the event."

Since then, the Tampa Devs team of event organizers has expanded to include three more people, plus tons of willing volunteers (and, with any luck, sponsors) to make their monthly events come together.

"Suddenly, we're at this large scale where we have actual volunteers that are helping run the event, and we've laid down a lot of the foundation," Trezevant says. "We can just sit back and be like, wow, this is actually running itself to a higher and higher degree over time. And it's just really awesome... it's like watching a plane take off and being able to fly under its own weight."

These days, Tang and Trezevant are thinking more deliberately about the long-term survival of the organization as a whole. That's why they decided to make things official and moved to incorporate Tampa Devs as a 501c3 non-profit.

"A lot of other tech groups don't necessarily do that," Trezevant explains, "which is understandable because it's more overhead. But for the things that we want to accomplish as a non-profit organization, we want this thing to last for like decades. We want to set it up for success and longevity, and so having that extra kind of legal structure around it was a decision that we made to ensure that it would have that longevity."

As Tampa Devs continues to evolve and expand its reach, Tang and Trezevant's vision of empowering developers and fostering growth remains at the organization's core. However, in the spirit of a larger vision for Tampa Devs, Tang has recently announced his plans to step down from running the day-to-day activities.

"When you look at an organization, and you think of its longevity and its growth," Tang explains. "You have to kind of shift your mindset from a working board over to a governing board, where it's not just you as a person, it's a 'we' as a collective. And so for that to happen over time...someone has to step down in order for someone to step up."

This shift in leadership dynamics sets the stage for a future where Tampa Devs can ensure continuity and encourage the emergence of new leaders within the community. The next leader will undoubtedly have some big (dancing) shoes to fill.

Today, Tampa Devs boasts remarkable membership of over 1,500 active software developers and techies. Their events consistently draw significant participation, with an average attendance surpassing 200 attendees. They host monthly networking events where community members can meet and mingle, monthly tech talks, and even holistic workshops around topics like personal finance.

To be part of this exciting community and stay updated on upcoming events, explore the Tampa Devs' Meetup Page or visit their website.

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