AI ODYSSEY AT HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY'S ALBANY LIBRARY
A partnership with the University of Connecticut and the Connecticut / Baden-Württemberg Human Rights Research Consortium

(HARTFORD, CT) – Hartford Public Library's (HPL) YOUmedia hosted a two-day event, AI Odyssey, in partnership with the University of Connecticut (UConn). AI Odyssey helps bridge the gap of the digital divide and encourages Artificial Intelligence (AI) exploration and learning in the Hartford community. The partnership began in January 2024 and cumulated with the AI Odyssey event at HPL's Albany Library.

"It was about taking that crucial first step—getting past the apprehension, the fear of the unknown. Once the students crossed that threshold, a new world opened up. They dove deeper, exploring everything from image generation and music production to game design and transforming 2D images into 3D-printed creations. We couldn't predict the direction of their exploration, but we were there to guide them through every step, supporting whatever paths they wanted to pursue," said Michael Elder, HPL's Assistant Director of Teen & Young Adult Services.

YOUmedia, temporarily housed at the Albany Library, is a digital learning and maker space for teens 13-19 to hang out and geek out with state-of-the-art technology. The YOUmedia team is equipped to help teens explore and turn their passions into reality.

"AI ignites students' creativity and enthusiasm as they witness how quickly their ideas come to life with its help. I was amazed at the amount of attention students gave to the workshop. They all became immersed in exploring," said Marc Pettersen, HPL's YOUmedia Manager.

YOUmedia and UConn are working jointly with the Connecticut / Baden-Württemberg Human Rights Research Consortium (HRRC), which provides an international, interdisciplinary, and inter-institutional platform to support academic collaborations between researchers and research groups at universities and institutions in Connecticut and Land Baden-Württemberg, Germany.

"What an extraordinary opportunity to see children engaging with AI in ways that inspired not only them as learners but all of us as participating in the process. The YOUmedia space was alive with activity – yet so carefully curated by library professionals who managed the constant flow of students over the course of several hours. I was thrilled to have UConn faculty and graduate students from such a wide range of fields involved, the breadth was amazing," said Shareen Hertel, Ph.D, Professor, Wiktor Osiatyński Chair of Human Rights & Professor of Political Science, UConn.

Aimed at middle and high school students, the AI Odyssey's learning objectives include:

- Leveling the playing field and knowledge of access to AI.
- Bridging the gap of the digital divide.
- Demonstrating the tools of AI and identifying the differences of each platform or application.
- Overcoming intimidation, increasing confidence and engagement.
- Promoting a fun learning experience with advanced technology.
- Understanding personalization of data.
- Overcoming resistance of standard educators and institutions to using AI as a learning mechanism.

"Generative AI is a powerful tool that has the potential to revolutionize how we think about education. It can act as an equalizer, leveling the playing field for students who may not have access to private tutors or even a friend to proofread their college application essays. Instead of creating fear around its use, we should embrace this technology and encourage students to harness its power ethically and use it to support their personal and professional growth," said Arash Zaghi, Professor, School of Civil and Environmental Engineering, UConn.

There are more events scheduled for the Spring of 2025. Please be on the lookout for more information or visit hplct.org.

About Hartford Public Library
Founded as the Library Company in 1774, and over its 250 years, Hartford Public Library (HPL) has remained at the forefront of redefining the urban library experience in the 21st century. The Library has seven full-service locations, two Boundless Library locations, and multiple outreach services, including the Library on Wheels and Story Stash, a 24-7 pickup locker. HPL provides education, intellectual enrichment, and cultural development for thousands of children, youth, and adults. HPL has gained local and national recognition for its wide range of new initiatives and partnerships designed to meet the needs of a diverse and dynamic city and region, including immigration services, employment assistance, and youth leadership training. For more information, visit hplct.org, and follow us on social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X (Twitter)).

250YRS
**HARTFORD
PUBLIC LIBRARY**