



ABOUT

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POLICY / ADVOCACY

NEWS / RESOURCES

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SAVINGS

Previous Next

Hackers Descending on Indy – But for Good Cause

June 22nd, 2022

More than 500 of the area’s best computer hackers are descending on Indianapolis in September, and Phil Swaim couldn’t be more excited.

In fact, Swaim – a threat and vulnerability management leader at Elanco Animal Health – is the ringleader.

While many of the skills taught at the three-day event could be used by criminal hackers, Swaim said training at the event known as CircleCityCon is aimed at stopping criminal hackers.

“You’re always teaching skills that can be used for bad things,” offers Swaim, a volunteer board member and CircleCityCon CEO. “We’re teaching within the context of defending against these hacks. We’re showing, here’s how to fight attacks, to be alerted to hacks and how to fix hacks without

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causing more damage. We want to teach in the context of helping people assess dangers based on posture and defend against those things.”

The event goes far beyond teaching skills applicable to desktop and laptop computers, smart phones and tablets. The event, says Swaim, also will dissect things like Bluetooth and web-enabled equipment on automobiles and transportation systems and home and business security systems. And with the increasing use of wearables and Wi-Fi controlled medical devices and implants, the event also will dissect biohacking.

To defend against hackers, you must think like them, Swaim states, and that “brings in a very quirky and eclectic crowd” to the local event.

One thing is certain: With illegal hacking, data theft, cyber-spying and ransomware on the rise, the demand for events like CircleCityCon have never been higher. Events like ShmooCon in Washington D.C., DefCon in Las Vegas and BSides Security Events held globally are seeing growing demand.

A small group of local ethical hackers was inspired to start CircleCityCon in 2014 because “we didn’t have a cybersecurity event here, and the issue of cybersecurity is too important, and there’s too much at stake,” Swaim stresses.

And the enemy is too strong not to have a coordinated effort against it.

“People don’t realize that some of the bad hacking operations have very sophisticated business models, with MBA-level people running them,” he adds. “These are hierarchical organizations with vast support networks.”

Attendees at the September 16-18 CircleCityCon can hear from industry professionals, attend training sessions and participate in “Villages,” where they

can get hands-on experience involving car hacking, lock picking and biohacking. Biohackers offer a range of body modifications like magnet strips, chip implants and subdermal LED lights.

While the event draws cybersecurity professionals, there is a general lure.

“We welcome newcomers or people who aren’t in cybersecurity,” Swaim states. “This is open for all people interested in security of computers. We have a lot of enthusiasts who come as well.”



Anthony Schoettle is the director of communications for the Indiana Chamber. He started with the Chamber in 2021 after a long career in journalism. He’s won multiple awards for his storytelling ability on a wide range of business topics.

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