

The Virgin Islands Consortium

College Students Inspired to Develop Apps for Practical, Real-Life Needs During UVI's HackFest

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Students from the University of the Virgin Islands recently showed off their entrepreneurial vision and spirit as part of the university's annual Hackfest competition, the institution of higher learning said via release Monday.

The two teams that won the UVI competition prepared concepts for apps to address the theme of the competition: "Increasing the Quality of Life for the Elderly".

Senior Tahlia Frederick-Ottley and junior Lateefah Evans worked together to design Senior Care, an easy way for seniors to get assistance with big or small tasks such as banking, shopping or filling a prescription by simply saying or typing it into the app.

According to the release, the idea for MediScan, an app to help elderly patients be more organized with their prescription medications, was developed by Shamir Smith, a senior who hails from St. Thomas, and his partner Akyem Prince, a junior from St. Croix.

Smith, who is interested in entrepreneurship, cybersecurity and app development, competed in HackFest to “test if I can create a realistic innovative solution to improve the quality of life of the elderly.”

The winning UVI students followed up on their local success by participating in the first-ever National Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Hackathon, UVI said. In partnership with AARP Foundation and Nex Cubed, the HBCU Founders Initiative hosted the Quality of Life Hackathon, during which the competitors submitted ideas for solutions to address a challenge perpetuating the wealth gap.

To tackle the challenge of the national competition, the four UVI students teamed up to envision Tollar, an app which would function as a hub for convenient access to government “safety net” programs and resources for those in need of assistance.

“We came up with the idea for Tollar, as a way to ‘keep a dollar safe’ and the national competition was a learning experience on being prepared, having a cohesive idea, playing to our strengths,” recalled Evans, who is from St. Thomas.

“Participating in these competitions helps our students to develop skills such as teamwork, creativity, market/competition assessment and user need assessment, which can be extremely beneficial in entrepreneurial activities or any career they choose,” said Dr. Tim Faley, Sokoloff Distinguished Professor of Entrepreneurship at UVI.

“This opened my mind to the endless possibilities of what is needed and can be done to help seniors and persons in low-income families,” said Frederick-Ottley, who hails from the British Virgin Islands.

For Prince, a key takeaway from participating in the HBCU Hackathon was “understanding who, what and why a problem is important, what changes it will bring, what purpose it has,” he observed.

Congratulating the students, Dr. Faley said, “I am very proud that, particularly in this environment where many things are still virtual, that these two teams were able to not just survive, but thrive.”

Due to restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic, the format of the annual UVI contest changed from a live 24-hour event (one Saturday on each campus) to a week-long online event, according to the release.

Supported by an Innovation Center on each campus, UVI offers experiential learning programs, which are funded by donors including AARP Foundation, Nearix and Leon Hughes.