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Students' app gives clear interpretations of government info

By MICHAEL WAYNE O'NEILL EJ (Monroe, N.C.) reporter

mwoneill@theej.com

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Waxhaw's Team Civic Compass, made up of (from left) Shanmukhi Malireddy, Kshetra Koti and Hasini Meruva, recently won the Presidential AI Challenge with the creation of the "Civic Compass" app.

Photo provided

WAXHAW, N.C. — A group of middle school students have been hard at work developing an app that is built towards making government information easy for people to understand.

The students, who are a part of Team Civic Compass, recently won the N.C. Middle School Track II — Technical/Built AI Technology category in the Presidential AI Challenge Competition.

The students — Kshetra Koti, Shanmukhi Malireddy, and Hasini Meruva — created an AI-focused project called “Civic Compass,” designed to help make complex government and civic information easier for people to understand and navigate. The platform emphasizes accessibility, simplified explanations, multilingual support, and improving access to government resources through technology.

The competition encouraged students to combine innovation, teamwork, research, and technical problem-solving skills to address real-world challenges.

The team’s supervising mentor, Venkat Meruva, also Hasini’s father, helped support the students with planning, deadlines, research guidance, and competition preparation, while the students themselves led the project development and presentation work.

Mr. Mervua did not have to give a lot of pointers once the team members came up with “Civic Compass”, but introduced the students to other AI concepts they could use for the app.

“When they came up with the actual concept, I didn’t give much in inputs during the first level, I gave some pointers to them to do more research,” Mr. Meruva said.

The team jumped on the research and brainstormed ideas to improve the app along the way along with mapping out features and key components.

“We had to take the inspiration from things around us,” Kshetra said. “And we basically built the app step by step and figuring things out one by one.”

Hasini said the team’s mission was to improve civic information and make it easily accessible to civilians.

“We found that app idea, and then we decided to improve on it,” Hasini said. “Once we got the main gist of what our app would do, we went on into branching it out because this can’t be one simple thing. It needs to have multiple features that everyone can use.”

Along the way, the team members also researched what it takes to understand the legal language of government documents. They based the app on the idea to to make it easy to translate to other languages for users to better understand and comprehend government information and documents.

Mr. Meruva said the team plans to continue improving the app and allowing other trusted users to test the app. He also said the app is authentic if it is tested by trusted users.

Shanmuki said the team also plans to improve the tools the app already has and add more that “help reach more people” who would use it in a good way.

mwoneill