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'Hackathon' seeks young creators for tech competition

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Submitted

Ladies and gentlemen, start your computers – Bowling Green's "Hackathon" is about to begin.

Programmers, designers, innovators and everyone in between are invited to the first Imagine_BGKY Hackathon, where teams of creators will compete in a tech development race to make Bowling Green better.

Khalil Garmon, Imagine_BGKY co-lead and founder of "MoneyBot," said a few hours is hardly enough time to assemble a finished product or software. That's exactly the point.

"The goal is you get a group of coders, programmers, you put them in a room, and you give them a prompt," Garmon said. "You usually are coding for an unreasonable amount of time, like 12 hours straight. It's just non-stop building."

The first Hackathon, to be held May 11 at Western Kentucky University's Innovation Campus, challenges participants to harness Bowling Green's growing economic and cultural potential through technological solutions.

Garmon said his company MoneyBot, an AI-powered financial literacy app based out of the Innovation Campus, stems from a Hackathon out of Nashville.

That event's prompt centered around meeting a need in the Black community, though Garmon had only intended to sign up as an organizer for the event. When he was encouraged to participate, it paid off.

"I brought that idea (MoneyBot) to Nashville at the Hackathon that I accidentally signed up for," Garmon recalled. "I (told the team) 'I don't know much about coding right now. I'll get your waters and everything, but I have a couple ideas.' They ended up running with my idea and made me feel a lot smarter than I was."

He said it was "life-changing" as he walked away with both the basis of his new company and a new appreciation for technological collaboration.

"It opened my eyes to the power of not just software and tech – that was a huge rabbit hole for me that I didn't really have in Bowling Green – but also the tech community of like-minded folks that are diverse, super creative, super ambitious," Garmon said.

With help from organizers across the WKU Innovation Campus, some of whom with businesses of their own, Garmon wanted to bring that opportunity to Bowling Green.

He said the collaboration found across the campus is what makes this event possible. The event is supported by AccelerateKY, The Central Region Ecosystem for Arts, Technology, and Entrepreneurship (CREATE) and the Chamber of Commerce Regional Technology Council.

Nessa Unseld, a WKU student, Imagine_BGKY co-lead and fellow Innovation Campus business owner, said the event aims to not only foster community but attract young entrepreneurs and professionals to the burgeoning city and campus.

"The theme of the Hackathon is 'building a better Bowling Green,' so our target audience is anyone who wants to build a better Bowling Green," Unseld said. "We want to be interdisciplinary with design and computer science, we want to have people who are long-term community members, international students or people in the workforce. We really want a melting pot of participants."

The event in May is only the beginning, with Unseld adding that a much larger event is in the works for around October this year. More details will be released after the event in May.

Unseld said they hope to gather around 10 teams of five for the first event. Participants can sign up together or individually to be placed with a team by organizers.

Participants must be over 18, though exceptions can be made for 16- and 17-year-olds currently enrolled full-time at an accredited university.

Attendance is free and attendees must bring their own computers and devices. Registration closes April 30 and can be found at cocreate-ic.com/imaginebgky-hackathon.

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