American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

BEing smart and prepared for their future

10/23/2020

When Tomias Davis thinks of the annual Black Enterprise BE Smart hackathon, he envisions dozens of software engineering students crowded in to a hotel ballroom, coding nonstop for 24 hours and consuming lots of snacks and energy drinks.

Although this was the third consecutive year that Davis would help organize the American Airlines-sponsored hackathon, he knew it would be different because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We didn’t know if we could pull it off,” said Davis, a senior project manager in American’s technology organization. “But we ended up with the most students ever registered and the largest number of HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities) participating and we were able to accomplish all of this virtually.”

The hack, which was held Oct. 9 and 10, virtually brought together 26 teams of 130 students, who represented 20 HBCU universities to design technology applications to enhance travel.

The winning team from Atlanta’s Morehouse College developed a mobile phone application that allowed passengers to order and purchase snacks and drinks as well as request flight attendant services, creating a touchless inflight experience. Other team concepts included using facial recognition to match luggage with a customer during check-in and developing trip planning software that caters to visually-impaired customers.

For Ceri Goff, this was a chance for her to give back to her community as the hack’s co-host and to represent female coders. More than 40 percent of the participants at the hack this year were women.

“When I was younger as a coder, I was always looking for others like me,” said Goff, who was one of ten 2019 hack participants that were hired by American. “Representation is crucial in this world and I stressed to this year’s

students to build your network even though we were all virtual this year. I was able to see the talent that is out there and also network with people at American and other tech companies."

American partnered with several other technology companies, such as HP, IBM, Mastercard and Microsoft, to mentor the students during the hack. With the hackathon behind them, students are now being interviewed by American and partners for summer internships and post-graduation jobs.

"Our ultimate goal is that these young men and women are able to find good entry level jobs right out of college by showcasing their ingenuity and their collaborative spirit," Davis said.