



Woodstock Community Unit School District 200

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WHS students win UN app competition to help global farmers

Two Woodstock High School students and an alumnus are part of a small team that achieved global recognition last week, securing first place in a prestigious app development competition hosted by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization.

The team—comprising senior students Eshaan Virani and Krishna Patel, along with WHS alumnus Prithvi Patel (Class of 2021) and cousin Parth Patel competed with 8 finalist teams among more than 100 who applied from Sri Lanka, Kenya, and India, among other nations.

Team leader and programmer Krishna Patel, who was inspired to pursue tech after following the FAO's work since freshman year, spearheaded the effort. "We were the only team from the United States to participate and the youngest as well," Patel noted.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) manages a vast global knowledge base of agricultural innovations, ranging from physical inventions to policy recommendations, intended for use by farmers, investors, policymakers, and researchers across the globe.

However, the existing digital platform was considered clunky and difficult to navigate. Through a February "hackathon," FAO challenged developers globally to design an accessible app to revolutionize how this vital information is accessed and utilized.

The team developed their winning app solution during the virtual weeklong competition from Feb. 12 -20.

"This meant missing some school, working until 3 or 4 a.m. some nights, and working hard and efficiently with my team," said Eshaan Virani.

Eshaan's primary role was designing the user interface, user experience, and developing a set of useful features. He focused on creating an "end-to-end" journey for users such as farmers and investors, ensuring solutions could be found as

efficiently as possible, even designing for users with unreliable wifi service in rural Africa and Asia.

Krishna's role involved continuous team leadership, meeting with esteemed mentors like Gina Lucarelli (steward of the world's largest social innovation lab) and former MIT grad Alex Van Grootel. Krishna also developed key functionality, including the app's AI-powered search bar.

Woodstock High School Principal Art Vallicelli said Eshaan and Krishna are exceptional students, who were previously recognized by Google for a different app they developed last spring.

"It gives me great pride to hear about their success, but it's no real surprise to me to see these students doing such impressive things. They are some of our brightest minds, but more importantly, they are also some of our most motivated students to engage in real-world activities that will prepare them for their chosen career paths," Vallicelli said.

Krishna and Eshaan's team pitched their innovation to an international panel of judges at 4:30 AM CST on Friday, Feb. 19, and were officially selected as the winners later that same day.

Their win opens doors to significant opportunities, including pitching their innovation at FAO Global events and exploring potential career pathways within the UN system. Further details on these opportunities are expected to be announced in April.

Eshaan and Krishna both plan to study computer science at a university next fall. Krishna is hoping to attend Duke or the University of California, Berkeley. Eshaan is considering the University of Illinois and waiting to hear from some West Coast options.