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For Immediate Release:

**JACKSON-AREA TEAMS PARTICIPATE IN MISSISSIPPI'S LARGEST-EVER HACKATHON,
SWEEP ESSENCE FESTIVAL #YESWECODE COMPETITION**

Three Student Teams Place in Top Four; One Team Tops 16 Others To Claim Grand Prize

New Orleans, LA – July 5th, 2015 – Could the next Google or Facebook be created by a team of young people from Jackson, Mississippi? The idea isn't so far-fetched now that twenty Jackson-area students have participated in Mississippi's largest-ever hackathon, developing mobile app ideas that resulted in big wins at the 2015 Essence Festival in New Orleans.

On June 30th and July 1st, twenty students from the Jackson area were joined by 60 others from throughout the southeast who traveled to the Jackson Convention Complex as part of a ten-day "Digital Freedom Ride" aboard Estella's Brilliant Bus. Working in teams, the students participated in an intensive day-and-a-half hackathon to brainstorm mobile application ideas and, with the help of volunteer mentors, develop and prototype their apps.

The hackathon, which coincided with the TECHJXN Innovation Summit held June 30th in Jackson, utilized a framework developed by #YesWeCode, a national initiative to help train 100,000 low-opportunity youth to become high-level computer programmers. Representatives from #YesWeCode were on hand to train mentors, guide team activities and prepare students for their final presentations to a celebrity panel of judges at the Essence Festival.

Local partners, including Kids Code Mississippi, Jackson State University, and Innovate Mississippi worked with the Mississippi Center for Education Innovation (MS)CEI to plan the event, recruit volunteers and provide workshops and activities to give students insight into the process of developing innovative ideas.

"I believe this hackathon was a historic opportunity to connect Jackson area youth with leading-edge platforms in technology and cutting-edge thought leadership," said Rhea Williams-Bishop, Executive

Director of the Mississippi Center for Education Innovation. “We have proven that when you empower students and expose them to opportunities that showcase their creativity and problem-solving abilities, they can accomplish truly amazing things. We are extremely proud that we were able to facilitate this process with the help of a diverse range of public and private sector partners and an extensive volunteer network.”

The hackathon participants were provided different tracks for teams to explore, touching on topics such as bridging the digital divide, improving education, reducing health disparities and helping cities address infrastructure issues. “Our objective was for teams to develop solutions to address big, real-world challenges,” said Randy Lynn, the co-founder of Kids Code Mississippi and a partner at Jackson advertising agency, Maris, West & Baker. Lynn, who served on the judging panel in Jackson was impressed with the teamwork and quality of the ideas presented. “Kids are natural innovators,” said Lynn, “I was blown away by some of the ideas presented. Wouldn’t it be great if every child in this state had this kind of opportunity?”

Jackson Metro Teams Win Big in New Orleans

Following the hackathon in Jackson, teams traveled to New Orleans to refine their prototypes and presentations. The celebrity judging panel, which included multi Grammy Award-winning recording artist, India Arie, chose four winners from the 17 teams, awarding top honors to three of the four teams from Jackson.

“This event foreshadows significant changes on the near horizon for Jackson,” Mayor Tony Yarber said. “Our kids are talented, creative and capable of competing in today’s tech-driven innovation economy. We must ensure they have the infrastructure in place to expose them to opportunities that cultivate their talents. This unique innovation summit and hackathon was just the first step in our commitment to support the Mississippi Center for Education Innovation in its effort to develop a TECHJXN Innovation Corridor supported by an unprecedented coalition of diverse local partners. This summit and hackathon will serve as a catalyst for a long process of developing a visible and accessible on-ramp to the innovation economy for all Jackson residents.”

Winning teams were presented awards by Kwame Anku, Director of Strategic Development for #YesWeCode an initiative of Dream Corps Unlimited.

Grand Prize

Application: "Global Emergency Community Contact (GECC)," a crowd sourcing app to report infrastructure or emergency issues to government officials, including law enforcement, fire department, public works, etc.

Team members: Devon McNeil (Provine High School), Ariel Dille (Provine High School), Rachael Griffin (Bailey APAC), Zadarius Macklin (Provine High School) and Elexis Daniels (Terry High School). GECC Team Chaperone was Sadie Harris, Provine High teacher.

The winning team received new Samsung Galaxy Tablet 4s and six months of mentorship from Matt Kurt, Chief Technology Officer, of the New Orleans-based e-commerce company, Turbo Squid.

Runners Up

First Runner-Up: "E-Lert"

Team members: Joel May (Murray High School), Dejure Mister (Wingfield High School), Joseph White (Clinton Jr. High School), Jordan Taylor (Callaway High School) and Dante Moore (Callaway High School). E-Lert Team Chaperone was Martina Henderson, a JSU student.

Second Runner-Up: "Catfish Catch"

Team members: Hugh Smith (Clinton Christian Academy), LaToria Hicks (Olde Town Middle School), Brianna Colton (Sumner Hill), Peighton Powe (Lovett Elementary School) and Jeremy Grant (Cordoza Middle School). Catfish Catch Team Chaperone was Alis DeJohn, recent USM graduate and (MS)CEI Intern.

The 4th Jackson team won overall in Jackson, but did not make it to the final round in New Orleans.

About the TECHJXN Innovation Summit & #YesWeCode Hackathon:

From June 30 through July 1, the TECHJXN Innovation Summit & #YesWeCode Hackathon was held at the Jackson Convention Center Complex downtown Jackson, MS. This event is the largest and most inclusive hackathon to take place in the state.

TECHJXN is the acronym used to describe four of the primary targeted economic growth sectors in Jackson's innovation economy: Technology, Entertainment, Construction and Healthcare. During the summit, local leaders addressed the concept of developing a TECHJXN Innovation Corridor. State and local leaders welcomed several of the nation's leading experts to discuss development of the nation's first inclusive innovation ecosystem in Jackson built around the framework of "inclusive competitiveness."

TECHJXN National partners are Estella's Brilliant Bus, ScaleUp Partners and #YesWeCode. Local founding partners and sponsors include: The (MS) Center for Education Innovation; City of Jackson; Innovate Mississippi; Jackson Public Schools; Jackson State University; Kids Code Mississippi; the Law Firm of David Pharr; Lemont Scott Group; Midtown Partners, Inc.; Maris, West & Baker Advertising; the Mississippi Center for Public Policy, IMS/Trensek, Mississippi College STEM Institute, Foundation for the Midsouth, Alignment Jackson and United Way of the Capital Area.

Learn more about the TECHJXN Event and Next Steps at www.techjxn.com.

About #YesWeCode

#YesWeCode is an initiative of Rebuild The Dream. The initiative targets low-opportunity youth and provides them with the necessary resources and tools to become world-class computer programmers. By learning this highly valuable and relevant 21st century skill, these young people are

shifting the trajectory of their futures and transforming their relationships with their communities and their country.

Learn more about #YesWeCode at www.yeswecode.org.

About Estella's Brilliant Bus

Estella's Brilliant Bus is a customized mobile learning center, designed to travel to communities and deliver services to children and families throughout the state of Florida, nation and world. Founded by Estella Pyfrom, the initiative provides educational training and self-help experiences in under-served areas that will empower children and families with life-long learning and access to technology. For her vision and dedication, Estella was named a 2013 CNN Hero. She received a "Standing 'O'vation from Oprah Winfrey, was featured in a Microsoft Superbowl commercial, and has been heralded for her works by a wide range of organizations.

Learn more about Estella's Brilliant Bus at www.estellasbrilliantbus.org

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