

Bitwise's new boot camp gives top Fresno-area programmers a leg up

By Hannah Furfaro



Jake Soberal, CEO of Bitwise Industries, speaks earlier this year during a community luncheon for its tech tenants, joined by University High School students who were taking classes at the upstairs Geekwise Academy in downtown Fresno.

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Bitwise Industries, a hub of fledgling technology companies in Fresno, is injecting \$200,000 into a rigorous new boot camp for computer programmers, an effort CEO Jake Soberal hopes will position Fresno as a leader in schooling local developers.

The program run through Geekwise Academy has already attracted 20 up-and-coming developers to compete for up to 10 paid spots in the 24-week program.

Those picked will develop websites for real clients in trades ranging from agriculture to the automotive industry. They will create software and learn how to integrate programs they develop with existing programs and websites.

“I would compare it to a laboratory style of learning,” Soberal said. The training will be on par with graduate-level course work, but “the difference is, it’s all real-world centric.”

Employers' call for developers is fast outpacing the number of people trained for such jobs, Soberal said, and the program will help ramp up the pool of local skilled developers to fill that need.

It's an offshoot of Soberal's coding crash courses through Geekwise Academy, a fast-paced program that's trained nearly 1,500 people on skills ranging from Javascript to Photoshop since opening in 2013.

"The demand hasn't waned at all, it continues to increase," Soberal said. "We cannot create high-quality developers fast enough and the first place to solve that problem will be the next best technology center."

Soberal envisions the new, highly selective program as one way to develop local talent into "industry rock stars" — and keep them close to home.

That's becoming increasingly important to Fresno's agriculture economy, said Timothy Stearns, executive director for Fresno State's Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

More and more, farmers are turning to computer software to help with land and crop management, Stearns said. And local programmers to help grow the high-tech side of farming are in high demand.

"You can actually come in with some high-wage jobs if they can build the proficiency there. That's what (Soberal is) tapping in to and I think that's great for economic development."

Jamin Brazil, co-CEO of market-research software company Decipher, Inc., said the move continues Soberal's vision to help unify Fresno's tech community, which for years went without a solid incubator for developing partnerships and ideas.

In past years it has been tough for Brazil to find enough qualified applicants to fill new programming positions at his growing company, which relocated to Fresno from San Francisco nearly 15 years ago. But with the creation of Geekwise Academy — and now the ramped-up training program launching this year — Brazil said it's become easier to find top talent.

He expects to hire at least 40 new programmers in 2015.

"We're having a much higher success rate than we've ever had before," he said.

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