

'Fab Five' kids with water app idea raise \$51,000

By Hannah Furfaro
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A band of brainy students saw a dream fulfilled Wednesday afternoon: The "Fab Five" boys from Riverview Elementary School who proposed a water-saving app to Fresno City Hall officials in March have raised enough money to create it.

Clad in bright yellow T-shirts with "Got Water?" emblazoned across the chest, the students — Noah Arsitio, Corben Beaty, Jeffrey Forbes, Evan Murai and Daniel Shin — formally pitched their app to a crowd of proud parents, business and city leaders at Bitwise Industries technology hub near downtown.

Needless to say, they got a green light.

In the past two weeks, the Fresno Chamber of Commerce and major businesses including AT&T and PG&E donated \$51,000, enough to fund the development of an app that could be ready by September for city dwellers across Fresno to download for free. Bitwise computer coders will do the heavy lifting.

"We didn't really think it was going to happen. It might do some good if it did, but (we thought) we'd never get the funding or someone to do it," said Jeffrey, 11. "Now we get to be a part of it and learn how coders do things."

With dozens of empty gallon jugs stacked inside a crowded Bitwise lobby, the boys explained that every Fresnoan uses an average of 80 gallons of water a day to shower and wash dishes. That balloons to 250 gallons when you count outdoor water use.

The city's water division is constantly getting information about customers' water usage, they explained. But customers, who are under new drought-driven pressure to cut water use, get only a big-picture view of their usage on their monthly bill.

Here's where the app fits in: Fresnoans could make smarter choices, the boys decided, if they received real-time water use updates on their smart phone or computer.

The team [initially came up with the idea](#) as part of their FIRST Lego League robotics competition project. The after-school activity involves robotics, but also requires students to come up with a project that could have a positive effect on society.

On the hunt for a project, the Clovis Unified sixth-graders and their coach Kevin Murai, Evan's father, decided to attend a Sept. 29 water forum at Hoover High. At the meeting, they learned City Hall computers are linked to the water meters of every residential, commercial and industrial customer.

This could make a timely topic, figured Murai and the students.

So they went with it. They first took the project to the world robotics tournament in St. Louis in April. Then, they [found partners among Fresno City Council members, Mayor Ashley Swearingin and Bitwise Industries](#).

At the Wednesday event, Bitwise CEO Jake Soberal said he was impressed when he first saw the team's technical requirement document, a list of all the technical bits and pieces needed to make the app work.

"Who did you guys hire to do this?" Soberal remembers asking the team. "Then of course their teacher looks to me and says, 'The kids did that,' and I am just blown away."

Soberal says he's counting on the team to help develop the app over their summer break. They'll come in to Bitwise a few days each week, he said, with the goal of developing an app by the time they head back to school.

Soberal then threw in an extra golden egg: each of the boys now have a lifetime scholarship to the company's Geekwise coding workshops.

Everything good that's coming to them is because they've shown a "flash of brilliance," he said.

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