

Metro East Start-Up Challenge winners announced, Highland Emporium takes top prize

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The Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC) for the Metro East at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville announced the winners of its 9th Annual Metro East Startup Challenge (MESC) in a presentation ceremony at the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois board of directors meeting in November.

The top four teams presented their winning business concepts to the LCSWIL board of directors which includes more than 200 leaders in business, industry, education, government and labor from throughout Southwestern Illinois.

The 2022 business plan competition had attracted over 39 entrepreneurs to compete for a \$25,000 prize package.

Taking top honors was Highland Emporium in Highland, with the first-place prize of \$10,000. Owned by Carol Eckhoff, Highland Emporium is a retail store that provides a locale for multiple small businesses that could not otherwise afford a brick-and-mortar presence.

Godspeed Transportation Solutions, also located in Highland and founded by Joseph Phillips, received the second-place prize of \$6,000. The company offers innovative sensor systems that reduce catastrophic risks of bridge hits and increase the safety and efficiency of car hauling.

JewelRide LLC, of Edwardsville, was awarded \$4,000 for its third-place finish. Owner Tapiwa Mupereki showcased JewelRide as a healthcare mobility company with a focus on providing non-emergency medical transportation to increase access to healthcare for all.

RedBox+ of St. Louis Metro East founders Rachel and Tharon Sperry, plan to grow their dumpster business territory with the \$2,500 fourth-place prize the Swansea-based company was awarded.

"We are impressed by the large number of superior quality concepts brought forth by the participants," said Jo Ann DiMaggio May, director of the IL SBDC for the Metro East at SIUE. "It made the evaluation process and final decision on awarding the prize money extremely difficult for all of our reviewers and judges."

Winners will also receive in-kind support from Carol Sparks with Sparks Law, of Troy, and accounting services from Kerber, Eck & Braeckel, LLP, of Edwardsville, to help form their businesses and manage start-up expenses. Other



2022 Metro East Start-Up Challenge winners paused for a photo with Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois (LCSWIL) representatives following their presentations at the November board meeting. From left: LCSWIL Chairman and President Gary Hoelscher, RedBox+ of St. Louis Metro East Founders Tharon and Rachel Sperry, LCSWIL Executive Director Kyle Anderson, JewelRide LLC Owner Tapiwa Mupereki, Godspeed Transportation Solutions Founder Joseph Phillips, Highland Emporium Owner Carol Eckhoff, SIUE School of Business Dean Dr. Timothy Schoenecker, IL SBDC for the Metro East Director Jo Ann DiMaggio May and SIUE Chancellor Dr. James Minor. (Photo by Melissa Crockett Meske/Illinois Business Journal)

in-kind services include website design assistance from Codd Interactive, of Edwardsville, cybersecurity/IT services from Belleville's Global Enterprise Services, and co-working space for a set period of time at The Lodge in Edwardsville.

Two additional prizes were also awarded as a part of the 2022 Metro East Start-Up Challenge. They included the MESC 2022 Woman, Minority, or Veteran Business of the Year, and the MESC 2022 Rural Business of the Year. Each of these winners was awarded \$1,500.

Desiray Allen of The Golden Bone Day Spa took home the Woman and Minority Business of the Year award. Joshua Douglas and David Huniak, of Troy, were named Veteran Business of the Year for their company, Earth Candy, which creates and manufactures unique and delicious acidified items: "think pickles but way cooler."

May and SBDC Business Specialist Marti Wieland were elated with the overall participation in the Challenge and the effort the applicants put into their business ideas and presentations. They look forward to continued community involvement for next year's Challenge as the MESC celebrates 10 years.

"Our goal is to continue to increase the awareness and reach of the Start-up Challenge's vast opportunities," May said. "The Challenge is becoming a recognized fixture in the region's entrepreneurial community, and the Illinois SBDC for the Metro East at SIUE looks forward to its continued growth and success."

The IL SBDC for the Metro East organizes and manages the competition with the support of the SIUE School of Business, as well as from other business and economic development partners throughout its nine-county service area.

Other finalists in the 2022 MESC included:

Charlie Rae, based in Edwardsville: an online children's boutique where the kid's clothes look good enough that even mom and dad would want to wear them.

EDURain, based in Edwardsville: a college student-centered platform that assists with the housing search.

Toast and Table, out of Belleville: an inspirational kitchen supply store to keep every home chef cooking their best.

The Challenge is made possible through tremendous regional support. Sponsors include the SIUE School of Busi-

ness, the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois, Growth Corp, Anders CPA & Advisors, PNC Bank, Madison County Economic Development, the City of O'Fallon, Illinois, Ameren Illinois Energy Efficiency Program, the City of Edwardsville, Town and Country Bank (Edwardsville and Fairview Heights locations), City of Highland, Carrollton Bank, St. Clair County Economic Development, the City of Alton, Regions Bank, FCB Banks, Monroe County Economic Development Corporation, and University Park at SIUE.

The Illinois SBDC for the Metro East at SIUE and East St. Louis assists start-up ventures like these, as well as existing businesses headquartered in the nine-county region of southwestern Illinois, including Calhoun, Jersey, Madison, Bond, Clinton, St. Clair, Washington, Monroe and Randolph counties. It is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration, Illinois Dept. of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and SIUE, as a service to Illinois small businesses.

To learn more about the SBDC, contact the IL SBDC for the Metro East at SIUE at (618) 650-2929.

Intersect Illinois releases annual report: \$402 million in new investment, project close rate doubles

Intersect Illinois, the state's not-for-profit economic development organization focused on bringing jobs and investment to Illinois, has released its annual report for the 2022 fiscal year. The report highlights businesses that Intersect Illinois helped relocate or expand during the fiscal year, which accounted for \$402 million in investment and 1,884 new jobs, an increase in jobs of nearly 10 percent over the previous year.

"As I reflect back on my first full year with Intersect Illinois, I'm pleased with the organization's growth and accomplishments," said Intersect Illinois CEO Dan Seals. "While there is still much work to be done, we are headed in the right direction and have a clear path to bring more jobs and investment throughout the state."

Seals started at Intersect Illinois in September of 2021. At the same time, Intersect Illinois hired its first Vice President

of Downstate Relations, Robert Stephan. Since then, Intersect Illinois has seen an increase in downstate projects, opportunities and board involvement. Intersect Illinois-assisted projects created 387 jobs and \$154.6 million in capital investment downstate in FY22, a 112 percent increase in jobs and a 137 percent increase in investment over the yearly averages since Intersect Illinois' inception in 2016.

The annual report highlights projects including 4Front, Danobat, Formic, GAF and Newcold, that Intersect Illinois assisted in locating or expanding in the state. Intersect Illinois' project close rate improved from 8.4 percent in FY21 to 17.8 percent in FY22. Top industries represented include manufacturing, agribusiness, and transportation and logistics.

"Intersect Illinois has been a great partner for Formic Technologies as we have looked to grow and expand our

presence in Illinois and the Midwest," said Formic Technologies CFO Jack Wagler. "Formic has appreciated and valued the guidance, insights, feedback and thoughtful suggestions that the Intersect Illinois team has provided."

More than 357 businesses located or expanded in Illinois in FY22

A deeper look at companies that located or expanded in Illinois is also included in the report, showing 357 expansions or relocations that brought 16,169 jobs and more than \$7.1 billion in capital investment to the state. The report illustrates the year-over-year increase in the number of expansions and relocations, new jobs, capital investment and square footage occupied and provides insights into each of these.

The report also showcases the proactive business attraction work that Intersect Illinois has recently prioritized, including

lead generation, digital marketing, familiarization (FAM) tour creation, the Be in Illinois marketing campaign and presence at the SelectUSA Investment Summit in Washington D.C. Additionally, the report highlights efforts to make the organization run more efficiently and effectively.

Finally, in FY22 Intersect Illinois welcomed Comcast, Illinois REALTORS, Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center, Nicor Gas and the University of Illinois System to its board of directors. This is in addition to existing representation from Ameren Illinois, ADM, Carle Health, ComEd, 8 Hospitality Group, Loop Capital, and OSF Healthcare. Intersect Illinois' engaged board of directors helps the organization generate public good with private sector efficiency, contributing expertise and connections to companies considering Illinois.