

# 2024 Metro East Start-Up Challenge winners announced

The Illinois SBDC for the Metro East at SIUE announced the winners of its 11th Annual Metro East Startup Challenge on Nov. 1, 2024. The 2024 business plan competition attracted around 35 entrepreneurs to compete for a portion of a \$28,000 prize package.

Moxie Pelvic Health and Wellness of Maryville was awarded the first-place prize of \$10,000. Dr. Amber D. Da Gama Rose founded Moxie Pelvic Health and Wellness in October 2023 to offer pelvic floor physical therapy to local women, men and children.

Central Equipment Solutions LLC (C.E.S.) of Alhambra received the \$6,000 prize as the second-place winner. Owners David and Audrey Tebbe started Central Equipment Solutions in March 2024. C.E.S. specializes in supplying and distributing heavy equipment components and parts in the construction, mining, and agricultural industries.

Smokehouse Jellies LLC of Highland took home the \$4,000 third place prize. Owners and husband and wife duo Ryan and Erin Hoepfner showcased Smokehouse Jellies LLC, specializing in artisan smoked pepper jellies designed to “elevate your next bite.”

Go Ahead Transport took the \$2,000 fourth place prize and plans to grow their non-medical emergency transport business. The Belleville-based company took home the fourth prize thanks to the generosity of Regions Bank.

“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.”

The winners will also receive in-kind support from Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois, Attorney Carol Sparks of Beckemeier LeMoine Law of Troy, and accounting services from Kerber, Eck & Braeckel, LLP of Edwardsville to help form their businesses, navigate legal issues and manage start-up expenses. Other 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.

For the fourth year, the competition was open to Fayette and Montgomery Counties. Macoupin County was added in 2023. Four additional prizes were also awarded in the following categories: MESC 2024 Woman, Minority, Veteran and Rural Business of the Year, all in the amount of \$1,500. These prizes were funded by Bank of Springfield, Justine Petersen, the City of O’Fallon, and Dietrich Bank, respectively.

Carmen McBride with Jam Right I Can LLC of O’Fallon took home the Woman

Business of the Year Prize, James Family Farm & Market of East St. Louis was awarded the Minority Business of the Year Prize, and Kimberly Kilgore with Paper Moon LLC in Mascoutah was awarded the Rural Business of the Year prize. Since there were no veteran businesses in the final round, an additional Woman Business of the Year prize was awarded to finalist Letha Dilworth and woman-owned business Extraordinary Balloons of Belleville.

The top four teams are set to present their winning business concepts before the Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois board of directors meeting on Friday, Nov. 1. LCSWIL includes more than 150 leaders in business, industry, education, government, and labor in southwestern Illinois.

DiMaggio May and the SBDC team are elated with the overall participation in the Challenge and the effort the applicants put into their business ideas and presentations, and they look forward to continued community involvement for next year’s Challenge as the MESC celebrates 12 years.

“Our goal is to continue to increase the awareness and reach of the Start-up Challenge’s vast opportunities,” DiMaggio 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 Illinois 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 plus-county service area.

Other finalists in the 2024 MESC included:

Monarch Rehab LLC of Maryville, a Physical Rehabilitation center specializing in cancer, lymphedema and pelvic floor therapies provided by a group of multidisciplinary professionals.

Belly Up Dog Training, based in Troy, helps turn dogs from mischievous to magnificent with dog, puppy, and service dog programs.

Black Hole Sun Disc Golf, located in O’Fallon and founded on the idea of growing the sport of Disc Golf and becoming recognized as the home of the greatest glow box known to the sport.

Stem Fit Kids of Swansea, offering engaging events that blend STEM, life skills, and fitness, aiming for growth through daily events and strategic partnerships.

The Challenge is made possible through tremendous regional support. Sponsors include the SIUE School of Business, Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois, Associated Bank, Growth Corp, Anders CPA & Advisors, Regions Bank, the City of O’Fallon, Ameren Illinois Energy Efficiency Program, the City of



Shown from left are Go Ahead Transport’s Genna Ginsburg and Paul Utsler; Smokehouse Jellies LLC’s Erin and Ryan Hoepfner; Moxie Pelvic Health and Wellness’s Amber D. Da Gama Rose, DPT; and Central Equipment Solutions LLC’s David and Audrey Tebbe. (Courtesy SIUE)



This is a representational collage of the businesses and organizations that supported the annual Metro East Startup Challenge. (Courtesy IL SBDC for the Metro East at SIUE)

Edwardsville, Heartland Bank and Trust, City of Highland, Carrollton Bank, St. Clair County Economic Development, The Gilead Group, FCB Banks, Monroe County Economic Development Corporation and the City of Alton.

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 plus-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 Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and SIUE, as a service to Illinois small

businesses.

By aiding entrepreneurs and companies in defining their path to success, the SBDC network positively impacts the Metro East by strengthening the business community, creating and retaining new jobs and encouraging new investment. The SBDC enhances the region’s economic interests by providing one-stop assistance to individuals by means of advising, training, research and advocacy for new ventures and existing small businesses. When appropriate, the SBDC strives to affiliate its ties to the region to support the goals and objectives of both the SIUE School of Business and the University at large.

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



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