

BIG IDEAS

Six finalists pitch their ideas for a new start-up venture



Photos by Pat Christman

Zachary Finholdt talks about Fin's Finest Labs during the Big Ideas Challenge Wednesday. His business concept won first place.

MSU, recent alumni compete for prize money

By Tim Krohn
tkrohn@mankatofreepress.com

A startup venture that aims to make it easier and cheaper to diagnose animal health issues and suggest and track treatments won the Big Ideas Challenge at Minnesota State University.

Fin's Finest Labs took the \$5,000 first prize and also garnered \$3,000 for winning in the Ag, Food and Beverage division of the competition.

Junior Zach Finholdt said Fin's Finest Labs specializes in diagnosing diseases in animals, big and small, while offering solutions to treat diseases.

"FF Labs focuses on providing a customized local, reliable resource to all animal owners."

The challenge gives MSU students and alumni within two years of graduating the opportunity to compete for \$18,000 in prizes to fund their business.

Finholdt's first-place finish also gives him an automatic entry as a semifinalist in the annual Minnesota Cup competition that awards large financial prizes to help promising startups.

Finholdt had goats and showed them at the fair as a kid and said they had to wait to get paper results of lab tests sent in by a veterinarian and couldn't easily



Heide Roeschli shows a STEM kit Wednesday that would be created by Louie Labs during the Big Ideas Challenge. Louie Labs garnered the High Tech division award and a \$3,000 prize and took second place, winning an additional \$3,000.

keep track of an animal's health history.

Fin's Finest Labs will offer "better technology, better testing" for owners of pets, small animals and for livestock owners.

"Instead of getting paper results, you have a database to keep track of the history of animals' results and testing and treatment," he said.

"We're a centrally located lab that can give you quick results and treatment options."

He is partnering with a veterinarian group, large livestock producers and others on the business.

He said the business will be less expensive and give people more knowledge about their animals' health and treatment.

The Big Ideas Challenge, hosted by the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, on Wednesday had six finalists

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IDEAS: Other winning ideas pitched

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pitch their ideas for a new venture before naming winners.

Ashley Niss, administrative coordinator of the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at MSU, said many of the past participants in the challenge have done well.

"The competition is a great way for our finalists to learn. We've had some pretty successful entrepreneurs come out of this," she said of the event, which is in its ninth year.

"Several of them have started successful companies or applied the skills they had for successful corporate jobs."

She said this year's crop of entrepreneurs was a good one.

"We had a lot of great applicants. I think the finalists we have this year are the best we've had."

Louie Labs

Louie Labs garnered the High Tech division award and a \$3,000 prize and took second place, winning an additional \$3,000.

Five students developed the concept: senior Franz Sherman, senior Yeng Moua, junior Heidi Roeschli, senior Daniel Armstrong and senior Benjamin Zuehlke.

Louie Labs is a subscription box that contains STEM-based projects and activities tailored to individuals with visual impairments.

Armstrong, founder of the lab, said helping visually impaired kids gain STEM knowledge will bring more of them into the professional fields.

"We hope this can break down barriers."

Team members said



Pat Christman

Harrison Braudis presents his idea Wednesday for 2 Seasons Snow Removal and Lawn Care during the Big Ideas Challenge.

STEM kits would be sent to kids who are blind or otherwise visually impaired to allow them to learn without intensive adult supervision.

They aim to sell 3,000 kits per month for \$50 per kit.

Allergy Aware

Allergy Aware took the People's Choice Award and a \$2,000 prize as well as capturing third place in the competition for another \$2,000 in prize money.

MSU graduate Brady Barr said his business idea will help those with food allergies to know what is in foods on the menu when they dine out.

"The solution lies in providing an allergy menu that clearly indicates the allergens present in each dish. That's where Allergy Aware steps in," he said.

They will partner with restaurants to develop personalized allergy menus. He said peanuts, milk, eggs, cheese and tree nuts can cause serious or even deadly reac-

tions in many people.

"It's a huge problem right now, and people have a tough time going to restaurants."

Barr worked with Pub 500 to create an allergy menu and got good feedback from the restaurant, which said the allergen menu has been embraced by customers with food allergies.

He is now working with restaurants in Sioux Falls to develop menus.

Participating restaurants will have a QR code at each table that customers can scan to get an allergen menu.

Other finalists were:

2 Seasons Snow Removal and Lawn Care

Sophomores Harrison Braudis and Chase Bartlett said their idea was an Uber and DoorDash inspired company.

They would deliver snow removal and lawn mowing services at the convenience of the customer through an app by pairing them with local snow removal or lawn care companies for a one-

time job.

He said the business would be focused on homeowners, particularly seniors and busy families.

Infinity 3D Concrete

Sophomore Bryce Stalboerger said the company would "utilize revolutionary technology to change the construction industry, and the world, through the limitless possibilities of 3D printing with concrete."

He said he has the knowledge as a construction management student to capitalize on the new field of 3D concrete printing.

The printers use a specially formulated concrete that is loaded into a printer with the printer programmed to produce a specific concrete item, from a planter to a storm sewer pipe to a concrete house.

HyperFocus

Junior Dominic Bothe said the mobile application is designed to help students with ADHD improve their academic performance in traditional classroom settings.

He said many students with ADHD drop out of school before graduating and said those with ADHD can have higher rates of substance abuse and accidents.

"Say goodbye to distractions and hello to success," he said of the app he is developing.

It will be a personalized and customized app for students that first tracks and manages symptoms, sets goals for the student, maps progress and has adaptive task reminders.