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2018 Metro East Start-Up Challenge offers \$20,000 in prizes

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EDWARDSVILLE - Entrepreneurs and new business startups are invited to compete in Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's fifth annual regional business plan competition – the 2018 [Metro East Start-Up Challenge](#) (MESC).

The MESC is organized by the Illinois Metro East Small Business Development Center ([SBDC](#)) at SIUE and facilitated with the help of the [SIUE School of Business](#). The purpose of the Challenge is to identify, encourage and support entrepreneurs and business startups across the SBDC's service area, including Calhoun, Jersey, Madison, Bond, Clinton, St. Clair, Washington, Monroe and Randolph Counties.

The first-place winner will receive a \$10,000 cash prize. Second and third place winners will be awarded \$6,000 and \$4,000, respectively. Prize winners will also receive an array of in-kind professional services including legal assistance from Curtis R. Bailey, Huffman Law Offices, P.C., accounting services from Scheffel Boyle, advertising from *Advantage News*, and a free financial review from Prudential. One of the semifinalists will also win a free 12-month lease at America's Central Port.

The Challenge is made possible through regional support and includes the following sponsors:

- SIUE School of Business
- Anders CPA & Advisors
- The City of Collinsville
- The Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois
- The City of Edwardsville
- Town and Country Bank (Edwardsville and Fairview Heights locations)
- America's Central Port
- First Bank
- St. Clair County Economic Development
- Carrollton Bank
- Growth Corp
- Madison County Economic Development
- The City of Alton
- Riverbend Growth Association
- FCB Banks
- The City of Columbia, Illinois
- Barber Murphy Group
- University Park at SIUE

“The Metro East Start-Up Challenge elevates the discussion of and support for entrepreneurship across our region,” said Jo Ann Di Maggio May, SBDC director. “Interest in the annual Challenge continues to grow with each passing year.”

The 2018 MESC invites entrepreneurs and startup businesses from the four target industries of information technology, manufacturing, healthcare and sustainable food.

For a startup business enterprise to be eligible, it must have been established after April 30, 2015, and be headquartered in the SBDC's nine-county service area. For pre-venture entrepreneurs, proposed new business operations will need to be located within the same nine counties.

"The competition itself is a great experience for anyone interested in owning their own business," said Joshua Colclasure, co-owner of Pint Perfect LLC. "Sammie and I were happy we could be a part of it."

"After winning the competition in 2017, we have been able to launch our company and start taking on clients," Colclasure continued. "Going to the SBDC is easily one of the best decisions we have made for our company. The team at the SBDC is great, and they are a valuable resource. The MESC competition is icing on the cake!"

"Although it was a lot of work to put together a thorough business plan, we are thankful that we took the time to do so and participate in the Challenge," said 2015 third-place finisher Tammy Rahm, co-owner of Stubborn German Brewing Company. "It forced us to look at every detail of the business and plan its direction. Now that we've been open for a year, we're in the process of reviewing the business plan, and ensuring we're on the right track."

"The MESC was an invaluable experience," said 2014 second-place finisher Adam Stumpf, owner of Stumpy's Spirits. "It allowed us to hone our business plan and define a route to market before launching our distillery. The feedback from the judges was an integral part of guiding our business in its first year. Bootstrapping our distillery forced us to stretch every dollar we had, and the award provided by the MESC was a key part in getting our business off the ground."

For more information on the 2018 MESC or to initiate the application process, visit siue.edu/metroeaststartup. The entry deadline is Thursday, Aug. 2. Semi-finalists will be announced Friday, Aug. 10, with finalists notified on Thursday, Oct. 11.

The Challenge will announce its cash prizewinners on Friday, Nov. 2, during the monthly Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois meeting.

The Illinois SBDC Network is a service to the community supported, in part, by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), the Illinois Dept. of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and the [SIUE School of Business](http://siue.edu/schoolofbusiness).

SIUE operates two [Small Business Development Centers](#) and the [International Trade Center](#). All three Centers provide resources, information and support to entrepreneurs, and small business owners in the nine-county Metro East region of Calhoun, Jersey, Madison, Bond, Clinton, St. Clair, Washington, Monroe and Randolph. By aiding entrepreneurs and companies in defining their path to success, the SBDC positively impacts the Metro East by strengthening the business community, creating and retaining new jobs, and encouraging new investment. 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 how the SBDC can help your small business, contact the Metro East SBDC at (618) 650-2929 or sbdecw@gmail.com.