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2019 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 the 2019 Metro East Start-Up Challenge (MESC), Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's fifth annual regional business plan competition.

The MESC is organized by the Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC) for the Metro East at SIUE. 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. SIUE's School of Business, the SBDC's host organization, will assist with facilitating the competition.

The first-place winner will receive a \$10,000 cash prize. Second and third place winners will receive \$6,000 and \$4,000, respectively. Prize winners will also receive an array of in-kind professional services to include legal assistance from Attorney at Law Carol Sparks and accounting services from Scheffel Boyle. The SBDC also is looking to secure other in-kind services to offer the three winners.

"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."

Entrepreneurs and startup businesses come from four target industries (but not limited to): information technology, manufacturing, healthcare and sustainable food. For a startup business enterprise to be eligible, it must have been established after April 30, 2016, 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.

Past winners are grateful to have competed, since the MESC positively and productively extended their business efforts, and strengthened their entrepreneurial journey.

Tyler Mueth and his five brothers won the MESC 2018 with their hydroponics company, Vast Produce. "The business plan competition was a truly rewarding experience," Mueth said. "The opportunity to network and discuss our idea and business plan with industry experts and leaders of the community was invaluable. We continue to grow and learn with the help of the SBDC and leaders we met through the competition."

The MESC includes three rounds, beginning with a brief questionnaire and executive summary submittal that is open to all applications that meet the eligibility guidelines. Participants selected for the second round are invited to expand on their entrepreneurial

concept by submitting a full business plan. These semifinalists are paired with business professionals who will mentor them through the competition and potentially beyond. The last round is the “final pitch” in front of a panel of business experts.

For more information, visit siue.edu/metroeaststartup. The initial entry deadline is Monday, Aug. 5. Semi-finalists will be announced Friday, Aug. 23. Finalists will be notified on Friday, Oct. 11.

The Challenge will announce its winners on Friday, Nov. 1 during the monthly Leadership Council SWIL meeting.

The Challenge is made possible through tremendous regional support. Among the sponsors are the SIUE School of Business, University Park at SIUE, the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois, Anders CPA & Advisors, the City of Collinsville, the City of Edwardsville, Town and Country Bank (Edwardsville and Fairview Heights locations), Monroe County Economic Development Corp., Carrollton Bank, St. Clair County Economic Development, Growth Corp., Madison County Economic Development, Bank of Springfield, the City of Alton, Riverbend Growth Association, FCB Banks, Barber Murphy Group, and.

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.

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.

Contact the Metro East SBDC at 618-650-2929 or sbdcedw@gmail.com.