

Semifinalists Chosen in SIUE Metro East Start-Up Challenge

by Doug McIlhaga

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EDWARDSVILLE – A dozen Southwestern Illinois-based entrepreneurs and their innovative business concepts have been selected to move into the second round of the 7th annual Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Metro East Start-Up Challenge (MESC) business plan competition.

More than 25 entrepreneurs expressed interest in the regional competition this year, according to Jo Ann Di Maggio May, Metro East SBDC director and MESC coordinator. About half of the individuals completed the entry process and were invited to participate in the next round.

“We’re extremely pleased with the sustained level of interest in our region’s business plan contest,” Di Maggio May said. “There has been a robust outpouring of enthusiasm about the Challenge from applicants, community leaders and our small business development partners. The SIUE Metro East Start-Up Challenge creates the opportunity to engage with the region in cultivating an important economic development strategy.

“Although only 12 remain eligible for the \$10,000 top cash prize, we encourage everyone who considered or entered the Challenge to access the SBDC’s wide menu of resources and expertise.”

Round two of the Challenge will require semifinalists to create a condensed business plan, develop financial projections and clearly define reasons why their business concepts will be successful. The Metro East SBDC will offer guidance and support to semifinalists in the form of workshops throughout September.

Competitors have until Sunday, Oct. 4 to submit their business plans and financial statements. Judges will select seven finalists, who will pitch their business concept on Thursday, Oct. 29 to a select panel of judges. Winners will be announced immediately following the pitch presentations.

First place is worth \$10,000, second place is \$6,000 and third place is \$4,000. This year, Regions Bank is sponsoring a fourth place prize. Winners are also offered an array of in-kind services. The semifinalists include:

Air Eye (Edwardsville)
Art Sculpt International (Fairview Heights)
Boss Level Merch (Highland)
Clara B’s Kitchen Table (Belleville)
Denali Building Supply (Edwardsville)
Desk Guardian, LLC. (Belleville)

EDUrain (Edwardsville)

FitU (Cahokia)

Hometown Meals, LLC (Greenville)

MBrew (Godfrey)

Pushing Limits, Inc. (Mulberry Grove)

Sharp Coffee LLC (O'Fallon)

The Illinois SBDC for the Metro East assists start-up ventures, as well as existing businesses headquartered in the nine-county region of Calhoun, Jersey, Madison, Bond, Clinton, St. Clair, Washington, Monroe and Randolph. 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. It enhances the region's economic interests by providing one-stop assistance to individuals by means of counseling, 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 about the SBDC, contact the Illinois SBDC for the Metro East at SIUE at 618-650-2929.