



2015 Metro East Startup Challenge Winners Revealed

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The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Metro East Startup Challenge (MESCC), a regional business plan competition for entrepreneurs and startups, officially announced its three cash prize winners on Friday.

The top teams of the nine finalists presented their winning business concepts at the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois Board of Directors meeting Friday, before a live audience of Leadership Council members and invited guests. The member-based organization includes more than 200 leaders in business, industry, education, government and labor.

The Leadership Council, one of the contest's prize sponsors, organized a group of business mentors and startup advisors to assist the 20 MESCC semi-finalists with their business plans. For the second consecutive year, PNC Bank was the Startup Challenge's premier sponsor and continues to support entrepreneurial activities in Southwestern Illinois.

Other prize money sponsors included University Park at SIUE, St. Louis Regional Chamber, City of Edwardsville and the Greater Belleville Chamber of Commerce. The Illinois Metro East Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at SIUE and East St. Louis organized and managed the competition with the support of the SIUE School of Business.

Scoville & Company grabbed this year's top cash prize of \$15,000 with its patented invention, [Pacidose](#). The infant and baby medicine dispenser functions like a pacifier to administer proper dosages. Company CEO Agnes Scoville, an emergency room doctor, and spouse Anson Scoville, a business executive, recently received a \$50,000 Arch Grant award.

[Slurv](#), created by Swansea resident Erik Beimfohr along with his partners Michael Wagner and James Daw, captured one of two \$5,000 runner-up cash prizes. Slurv is a free messaging app for fantasy sports that enables players to communicate with each other during the fantasy sports league competition.

[Stubborn German Brewing Company](#), the final \$5,000 winner, is owned by Monroe County residents Chris and Tammy Rahn. The Rahn's will invest their cash prize in creating German-style ales and lagers. The highly anticipated microbrewery is expected to open summer 2016 in downtown Waterloo.

Other finalists in the 2015 Metro East Startup Challenge include:

- BonafIDcatch (Alton), Joan Stader, Co-Founder & Managing Partner
- com (Edwardsville), Ryan O'Day, Owner
- Prime Time Packaging (Edwardsville), Bryson Weaver, Founder/CEO
- Saving Grace Beauty (Glen Carbon), Erica Harris, Founder
- Star Client (St. Louis), Tiffany Graham, Founder/CEO
- ViTAL, LLC (Edwardsville), Jenna Gorlewicz, President & Founder

Women entrepreneurs dominated this year's competition, according to Patrick McKeehan, SBDC director and MESC organizer. Five of the MESC finalists listed a female as CEO or founder and two of the three cash prize winners were wife-husband teams.

"I was quite impressed by the large number of highly competitive participants," said McKeehan. "It made our evaluation process and final decision on awarding the prize money extremely challenging."

The \$25,000 cash prize for this year's MESC is \$10,000 more than last year and organizers expect 2016 to be even greater.

“Our goal is to continue to increase the number of participants, sponsors and advocates,” McKeehan explained. “The Startup Challenge has reignited interest and support for the region’s entrepreneurial community and we want to keep adding fuel to that fire.”

The [Illinois Metro East SBDC](#) works directly with entrepreneurs and small business owners located in the nine-county Metro East region of Calhoun, Jersey, Madison, Bond, Clinton, St. Clair, Washington, Monroe and Randolph. It is funded through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and Southern Illinois University Edwardsville as a service to the region’s entrepreneurial and business community.

The Illinois SBDC Network provides one-stop assistance to individuals by means of counseling, training, research and advocacy for new ventures and existing small businesses. As a key member of this Network, the Illinois Metro East SBDC delivers these important services to its clients while supporting the goals and objectives of both the SIUE School of Business and the University at large. To learn how these no-cost services may help your small business, contact the Illinois Metro East SBDC at (618) 650-2929 or sbdcedw@gmail.com.