



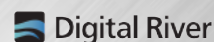
# ELEVATING ENTREPRENEURS

## 2014 Minnesota Cup

75F defeated nearly 1,300 competitors with its energy saving wireless temperature control system.

Division winners pictured above: (Top) Deepinder Singh and Jay Schrankler, 75F; (Second row from left) Joseph Jensen, Andas; Joe Stanton and John Cohoon, Elevate Research; Clayton Anderson, Jason Sundby, Carter Anderson and William Fowler, Verde Environmental Technologies; (Third row from left) Mickey Baker and William Brown, Trovita Health Science; Leon Wang, Mary Miller, Jeff Freeland Nelson and Trevor Burns, Play From Scratch; and Connor Wray and Erik Brust, Jonny Pops.

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# A DECADE OF COMPETITION

The Minnesota Cup celebrates 10 years of helping entrepreneurs polish and promote their business ideas.



Dan Mallin, John Stavig, Melissa Kjosling, Scott Litman

In launching the Minnesota Cup business plan competition 10 years ago, Dan Mallin and Scott Litman wanted to encourage budding entrepreneurs to champion their ideas on a bigger scale. In short order, it became deeply engrained in the economic ecosystem of the state, emerging as a key player in supporting and launching early-stage companies.

More than 9,000 entrepreneurs from across Minnesota have competed in the free competition since 2005, winning thousands of dollars in prize money, advancing hundreds of business ideas, and creating numerous jobs. Often just as critical, participants have reaped benefits from multiple sources: seminars on writing business plans and raising capital, expert feedback from mentors and judges, and networking with business leaders and other entrepreneurs.

Investors now view Minnesota Cup competitors as burgeoning prospects, pouring more than \$160 million into finalist and winning companies during the past decade, according to 2014 survey results.

"For many of the top entrepreneurs, the seal of approval that they are a Minnesota Cup finalist or winner has been really beneficial in getting attention for raising capital and developing partnerships," says Litman, co-founder and managing partner of Magnet 360, a Salesforce.com consulting and implementation partner.

"It's really powerful when an entrepreneur can present a business plan and say they were a finalist in the Minnesota Cup," Litman adds. "So many people know that means the plan was well-vetted and reviewed by amazing business leaders and investors, and that they should pay attention."

## Bigger and Better

The Minnesota Cup has continually grown and evolved during its 10-year history. That change includes ramping up its prize money, adding new programs throughout the year, and finding fresh ways to reach out to entrepreneurs in every corner of the state. This year, nearly 1,300 entrepreneurs



vied in seven divisions for \$300,000 in prize money, up from \$200,000 last year. A new division this year focuses on food, agriculture, and beverage, joining the existing categories of high tech, life science and health IT, general, social entrepreneurship, student, and energy, clean tech, and water.

The competition quickly succeeded by mobilizing the legions of people who want to support Minnesota entrepreneurs while becoming deeply embedded in the state's entrepreneurial life cycle, says John Stavig, director of the Gary S. Holmes Center for Entrepreneurship at the University of Minnesota, an inaugural Minnesota Cup partner.

"We have a record number of participants, and the competition continues to grow. I'm more bullish on the growth potential going forward than I've ever been," he says. "It's got extremely high credibility in terms of broad support from key organizations and individuals. We increasingly see individuals and organizations come to us and want to get involved."

The Minnesota Cup enjoys a deep pool of abiding sponsors and supporters, including the U, the state, Wells Fargo, and numerous other law firms, banks, and companies that got involved early and stuck around. In addition, newer partnerships with several regional initiative foundations also have borne fruit, bringing Minnesota Cup to places like Fergus Falls and Worthington and encouraging entrepreneurs from all corners of the state to compete. Since its inception, the competition has attracted entries from 85 percent of Minnesota's counties.

This year, the Minnesota Cup added programs for women, hosting the first annual Women's Entrepreneur Event this spring. More than 300 participants took in sessions with experienced female entrepreneurs, who offered guidance on pre-startup issues, legal concerns, financing, driving growth, and more. Already the Cup has seen a boost in women-led teams, increasing to 34 percent of entries from 25 percent last year.

"Women entrepreneurs are an untapped resource for ideas and entrepreneurial energy," says Minnesota Cup Director Melissa Kjolsing. "They aren't necessarily thinking high-growth, high-potential businesses, and we want them to start thinking bigger. The Minnesota Cup is for everyone, and that includes women."

### **Lasting Contributions**

Though a select group wins the competition, most of the participants still profit from wide-ranging advantages. They often expand their networks, sharpen their strategies, gain media attention, and attract capital. Even seasoned entrepreneurs benefit from competing.

Lee Jones entered her microbiome company in the Minnesota Cup in 2011, armed with experience leading several medical technology start-ups, and even serving regularly as a

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**While prize money certainly helps, many finalists and winners report that the mentoring and advice they receive is even more beneficial.**

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competition mentor. Jones saw many reasons to compete, including deadline-induced motivation to complete her business plan and the opportunity to hone her pitch.

"It was huge. I hadn't been involved in the entrepreneur scene for several years, and a lot had changed," says Jones, founder, president, and CEO of Roseville-based Rebiotix, which competed as Symbiome. "I went to all of the free seminars, and I appreciated the refresher course on a lot of things. I felt like I

had a jump-start when I got going."

The company earned finalist status and raised \$5 million from Minnesota investors that fall, which paid for three years of start-up costs. This summer Rebiotix closed on its second round of funding for \$25 million, which will help it commercialize medications that treat infectious diseases with live microbes.

And while prize money certainly helps—up to \$80,000 for the grand prize winner—many finalists and winners report that the mentoring and advice they receive plays an even bigger role. Semifinalists get paired with at least one mentor, who often has expertise in their industry. They typically provide guidance on business plans, strategy, growth opportunities, and more. After the competition, many continue their support by serving as board members, investors, or door openers to their professional networks—intangible and often otherwise inaccessible support that fuel start-ups' growth and development.

Steve Anderson, CEO of Preceptis Medical and last year's grand prize winner, says capturing the Cup helped his Plymouth company secure vital capital. It currently is running clinical trials on its device for implanting ear tubes in children without general anesthesia.

Winning the competition had an immediate impact. The very night Preceptis won, it got invited to present its plans to a group of angel investors later that week. They eventually joined a funding round that provided the company with \$4.1 million. Post-competition, the Mayo Clinic came calling, seeking to participate in its ongoing clinical trials.

"The cachet and publicity around the Minnesota Cup has been outstanding and priceless. Investors constantly ask about our experience in the Minnesota Cup and what it meant," Anderson says. "It's been an extremely important imprimatur for investors."

Minnesotans with business ideas now know that a vital stop on their journey to success includes competing in the Minnesota Cup. They walk away ready to propel their company to the next level. •

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## 75F



Deepinder Singh, Jay Schrankler

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Most office workers have little control over the indoor temperature, leaving some employees sweltering and others chilled to the bone. After struggling with widely varying temperatures in his home, Deepinder Singh wanted to help. He was inspired to make work environments more comfortable.

A veteran systems engineer and entrepreneur, Singh started 75F in Mankato this spring to commercialize its smart heating and cooling technology. He and his team spent seven years developing a wireless temperature control system that can be programmed for individual preferences. Designed to modulate temperatures proactively, 75F allows business customers to slash their energy costs up to 40 percent, Singh says.

"All thermostats are reactive. They figure out that the temperature is too hot and turn on the air

conditioner," says Singh. "We predict what will happen and make small, subtle adjustments to keep people comfortable."

The 75F system uses wireless zone controllers in each room for individuals to set their ideal temperature. They monitor existing room

### PRIZES FOR WINNER

- \$30,000 in seed capital.
- Scholarship for the 2015 National Cleantech Open Accelerator.
- Accounting assistance from Eide Bailly, LLP.
- Professionally produced and edited video of final pitch at Grand Prize judging round courtesy of TECHdotMN.
- Scholarship to the Minnesota High Tech Association's annual Minnesota Venture & Finance Conference.

conditions, including whether the space is occupied, and send this information to a central control unit. It transmits data from all of the building's zones to the cloud, where servers combine it with weather forecasts to create a thermal plan. Throughout the day, the central control unit adjusts the conditions by opening and closing dampers in each room.

In addition, 75F offers automated ventilation, bringing in outside air only when it's needed to keep the air fresh. This contributes to energy savings, because it zaps extra energy to heat frigid outside air or to cool warm, humid air.

**“We take inspiration from the fact that people are beginning to raise the summer set point from 72° to 75°F to be more ecological. In fact, we think 75F is ‘the new cool.’”**

— From 75F's website

Singh originally developed his concept for the residential market. He started Suntulit, which won the GE Ecoimagination challenge in 2011. But the company struggled to gain traction with retailers, who hadn't caught on to the "Internet of things." So Singh pivoted the technology to work in other buildings, finding a niche in the light commercial office space of 25,000 square

feet and under, such as doctors or lawyers' offices. These structures make up about 90 percent of the commercial buildings in the United States, giving 75F a big opportunity.

"All of the current incumbent players are focused on the Class A market. Light commercial buildings have a single thermostat for the building," says Singh. "We have a building automation system in a box, and it's easily deployable. We bring many of the

features you'd expect in a Class A building and democratize it for the light commercial market."

Singh, who moved to Minnesota to train for the Olympics in pistol shooting, employs 14 people in India and the United States. The company's technology has piqued the interest of contractors, distributors and several large retailers, who aim to use 75F in their stores. •

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# TROVITA HEALTH SCIENCE



Mickey Baker, Will Brown

with highly digestible whey protein, setting it apart from competing brands like Nestle's Boost and Abbott's Ensure, says Brown, CEO of the Minneapolis company.

"If you look at the rest of the market, there is nothing like us out there. All of the other products are either low-quality ingredients, high sugar and proteins that aren't well used," Brown says. "Enu starts to separate from the crowded pack of low-protein, high-sugar drinks, and that has really allowed us to gain a lot of favor with health care professionals."

Trovita developed Enu with a food scientist, and it launched its product in February. Mostly it sells Enu on its web site and Amazon.com, at some Whole Foods and Hyvee grocery stores, and at hospitals and pharmacies nationwide. So far, Trovita has sold 16,000 bottles in the 41 states through

e-commerce, becoming Amazon's No. 1 new release for meal replacement. Recently, University of Central Arkansas, a Division I school, made Enu its exclusive drink for athletes, and Brown expects other universities to follow suit.

Though Trovita faces a tough battle against Abbott and Nestle, Brown says there is still plenty of room for a new player like Enu. Those brands bring in \$2 billion a year; even if Enu captures the No. 3 position, it might generate \$100 million annually, he adds. Investors agree, providing Trovita with \$2 million so far.

Trovita enjoys an advantage at stores like Whole Foods, co-ops, and other natural food shops, Brown says, because Enu is organic and made from non-GMO ingredients. It also has no added sugar or corn syrup. So far, the response to Enu has been quite positive.

Exhibiting at trade shows this spring, Brown says, "Dieticians would say, 'We've been begging Abbott and Nestle to come up with a product like this, and they've ignored us. We're so happy Enu is in the market. It's such a healthier product and it tastes so much better, too.'" •

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**A**iming to create a product that assists people who have cancer, William Brown chatted with health care providers about what their patients need most. Nutrition kept rising to the top of their lists. Many cancer patients, seniors, and others rely on nutrition drinks to gain weight, but health care providers often complain that they are too high in sugar and made with difficult-to-digest proteins.

Brown and his team—who worked together at MGI Pharma before it was acquired—started Trovita Health Science in 2011 to develop a better meal-replacement beverage. They came up with Enu (pronounced en-you), a high-protein, organic, lower-sugar drink. Trovita's drink is made primarily

### PRIZES FOR WINNER

- \$30,000 in seed capital.
- Professionally produced and edited video of final pitch at Grand Prize judging round courtesy of TECHdotMN.
- Scholarship to the Minnesota High Tech Association's annual Minnesota Venture & Finance Conference.

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## PLAY FROM SCRATCH



Leon Wang, Mary Miller, Jeff Freeland Nelson, Trevor Burns

right before Thanksgiving, selling \$15,000 worth online that holiday season. And then there were crickets.

Nelson realized he needed a store-friendly toy. Through trial and error—and consulting with local retailers—Nelson came up with the brightly colored YOXO (pronounced yock-so) building sets. Made from recycled and recyclable materials, YOXO are Y, O, X, and I-shaped pieces that allow kids to connect items like paper towel tubes and cardboard boxes. It comes in generic sets or kits like the YOXOBot robot, dragonfly or dune buggy, giving kids guidance while also promoting freeform building.

Last year, toy stores such as

Creative Kidstuff and Peapods started selling YOXO, and demand took off. “We’ve been playing catch-up ever since,” says Nelson. “We’re completely out of inventory, and that’s usually the way it is. Every kit we make, we ship that day.”

About 110 stores nationwide now sell YOXO, fueling enough demand for Nelson to hire seven employees. To quicken production, he secured funding to purchase an expensive water jet cutter and partnered with Ally People Solutions, a nonprofit whose disabled clients prepare pieces for shipping. Still, the company is outgrowing its factory and needs to prepare for the bright future Nelson anticipates.

Yoxo’s many selling points—including that it’s eco-friendly and made domestically—might help it compete with Lego, which dominates the building toy market with \$4.6 billion in revenue. “If we can grab 1 percent of their market share, we’re a \$46 million business,” Nelson says.

“I’m not alone in our concern that there is a lot of focus on virtual, and we’ve got a bunch of kids that are more comfortable launching Angry Birds at a fake fort instead of building a fort in their back yard,” he says. “Kids need to learn how to make. It might be the important life skill.” •

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It’s a common experience for parents: Give the kids a carefully selected present and all they want to do is play with the box. But Jeff Freeland Nelson loves open-ended toys that help kids unleash their creativity. He developed a product that reminded him of the best gift he received as a boy: a cardboard box filled with tape, string, and wires.

“It was an ecstatic experience, and I made all sorts of crazy stuff with it,” he says. “I remember thinking that someone should sell this as a toy.”

Nelson decided the time was right 30 years later. Tired of traveling as a lobbyist, he quit his job in 2012 to start Play From Scratch in St. Paul. First it came out with a line of raw materials kits, including its World Famous Box of Boxes. It launched

### PRIZES FOR WINNER

- \$30,000 in seed capital.
- Accounting assistance from Lurie Besikof Lapidus & Company, LLP.
- Professionally produced and edited video of final pitch at Grand Prize judging round courtesy of TECHdotMN.
- Scholarship to the Minnesota High Tech Association’s annual Minnesota Venture & Finance Conference.





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# ELEVATE RESEARCH



Joe Stanton, John Cahoon

cept and software while working full time. They were inspired to take the leap and launch Elevate Research in January after watching a friend compete successfully in the Minnesota Cup last year. In short order Elevate had 12 clients, including Dunn Bros. Coffee, D. Brian's Deli, and MyBurger, and it soon will kick off a trial run with Anytime Fitness. This fall, Elevate will branch out into the hotel industry.

Elevate takes the guesswork out of surveying by providing templates for retailers or restaurants to insert company information. They also can add or edit survey questions—customizing surveys to fit different locations or specific concerns—and design formats that mirror their brands.

In addition, the platform engages with clients' customers by helping them post reviews on social media or interact with loyalty programs. And if there is a complaint, Elevate's app quickly notifies clients so that they can address the issue before it blows up. Retailers and restaurants pay for the service on a per month/per location basis.

This summer, Elevate secured \$500,000 in capital from local investors. It will help the company expand its sales and marketing efforts worldwide and integrate its product with other features like mobile payment systems, online shopping carts, and restaurant reservation software.

Stanton sees strong growth for Elevate based on initial demand. It has a big market to pursue, with 1.3 million small and medium restaurant and retail businesses in the United States—a \$550 million addressable market—as well as 40 million restaurants and retailers globally. In search of affordable survey alternatives, larger businesses also have expressed interest, he adds.

"Small to medium-sized businesses are looking for a good option, and there hasn't been one," Stanton says. "Restaurants and retailers have more competition, and consumers are spending less, so they are getting squeezed. They want to know how to get eyes and ears on their locations. When they find us and see that it's affordable and that they can modify our templates, it's fantastic for them. •

**A**fter working in the customer survey industry for more than a decade, Joe Stanton and John Cahoon realized that small to medium restaurants and retailers were being shut out of the market. Most legacy market research companies are too expensive for businesses with less than 200 locations, and free services like Survey Monkey can't be easily customized.

"We sat down and said, 'What if we could take the best of what we're doing now so that it really meets their needs, and combine it with what's great about Survey Monkey so that it's super easy to use and affordable,'" says Stanton, CEO. "And that's exactly what we did."

The partners spent two years developing their con-

### PRIZES FOR WINNER

- \$30,000 in seed capital.
- Business organization (or services of similar value) from the law firm of Gray Plant Mooty.
- Accounting assistance from Lurie Besikof Lapidus & Company, LLP.
- Professionally produced and edited video of final pitch at Grand Prize judging round courtesy of TECHdotMN.
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# ANDAS



Joseph Jensen

asthma under control, many people use inhalers and other medications that reduce inflammation. Licensing sensor technology from the University of Minnesota, Jensen and a partner started Andas to diagnose respiratory inflammation long before it triggers an asthma attack. Its device uses sensors to detect biomarkers in the lungs that indicate brewing inflammation.

"Our device can detect the stage before inflammation happens," says Jensen, who is a fourth-year student and an asthmatic. "That aids in the initial diagnosis, and it's helpful with medication management. The major control for asthma is inhaled corticosteroids to combat inflammation. With our device you can monitor how effectively they are addressing the problem of inflammation."

Last year, Andas raised some angel funding to pursue the idea, and the company completed a prototype this summer. It's a handheld device about the size of two older iPhones stacked on each other. Users blow into a nozzle and it transmits data via smartphone or Bluetooth to a doctor's office. Physicians then analyze patients' data and adjust their medication to treat high or low inflammation.

Jensen will continue to refine the device and eventually will seek FDA approval. Once that's secured, Andas will first sell to physicians, then consumers. The device will be free for doctors, with Andas taking a percentage of the insurance reimbursement for each diagnostic test. Consumers will buy the device for a small fee and also pay for testing through Andas' smartphone app.

There are 80 million doctor visits related to asthma each year, and reimbursement covers about 60 percent of those asthmatics. That means Andas has 48 million opportunities annually for patients to use its device in the clinic, hospital, or emergency room, Jensen says.

"Asthma is a chronic disease that's only getting worse. There are 235 million asthmatics worldwide, and the World Health Organization predicts that in 10 years it will increase by another 100 million," says Jensen. "People with asthma aren't able to take control of their health because there just aren't the right tools. Our mission is to help asthmatics manage their condition, and we plan to take it one breath at a time." •

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**T**here are 25 million asthmatics in the United States—including 7 million children—and they have roughly 44,000 asthma attacks every day. Yet asthma treatment hasn't evolved much in decades, despite growing numbers of people developing it each year. With Andas, medical student Joe Jensen aims to develop proactive ways to manage the condition instead of reacting during asthma attacks.

Asthma is triggered by inflammation in the lungs that can build up and constrict the airway. To keep

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Clayton Anderson, Jason Sundby, Carter Anderson, William Fowler

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- **Kayla Yang Best** – Education Director, Bush Foundation

place it in a Medsaway bag, add water, and let the activated carbon inside break down the drugs through a chemical process. They can toss the bag right into the garbage.

"We're excited about providing a product that's inexpensive and easy to use, and it's attacking the problem of disposing of unwanted pharmaceuticals," says Clay Anderson, CFO of Verde. "It's an epidemic, and we're excited about solving it."

Verde tested the effectiveness of Medsaway on more than 30 drug compounds—from potent Fentanyl patches to Vicodin,

**U**nused prescription drugs cause all manner of problems—for the environment, for the individuals who abuse them, and for the health care system—to the tune of \$72 billion annually in the United States. And though most people want to safely dispose of their unwanted medications, they don't know how. They often flush them down the toilet, leaching harmful chemicals into surface and groundwater.

Verde Environmental Technologies has a solution with its Medsaway product. The Burnsville-based company developed a medication disposal system that neutralizes drugs in capsule, tablet, liquid, or patch form. To safely dispose of medication, users

Percoset, and Amoxicillin—and found that nearly 80 percent of the medication gets neutralized in the first eight hours, climbing to more than 92 percent one week later and 98 percent in two weeks. It's a strong alternative to drug take-back programs, where only about 2 percent of medications get returned, Anderson says.

Walgreens, Cub, Albertsons, and other retailers currently carry Medsaway for at-home use. In addition, Verde forged a partnership this year with St. Louis-based Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals to distribute Medsaway to physicians, clinics, hospitals, and pharmacies. Verde continues to work on expanding its network of retailers and health care providers that carry Medsaway.

The team behind Verde launched the company in 2011, coming off of a successful start-up and sale of Travanti Pharma, which developed an extended time-released transdermal patch for medication. Led by CEO Andrew Korey, who has a Ph.D. in pharmacology, Verde is driven to mitigate the social and environmental impacts of unwanted pharmaceuticals, says Anderson. •

## PRIZES FOR WINNER

- \$20,000 in seed capital.
- Professionally produced and edited video of final pitch at Grand Prize judging round courtesy of TECHdotMN.
- Scholarship to the Minnesota High Tech Association's annual Minnesota Venture & Finance Conference.





## STUDENT DIVISION WINNER

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# JONNY POPS



Connor Wray, Erik Brust

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Jonny Pops' flavors before hiring a chef to finalize its recipes. The social mission also was part of the original plan, prompting the company to honor Jonny's memory by donating a portion of sales to the Hazelden Foundation and other charities. Jonny Pops also prints each popsicle stick with a pay-it-forward message about such things as planting a garden or recycling.

Jonny Pops makes four flavors at its St. Louis Park facility, including Merry Mountain Berry, Choco Latte, and Coconut Pineapple Paradise. Co-founder and COO Connor Wray says the pops stand out from other frozen treats because cream makes them

taste like a smoothie on a stick

instead of a frozen-fruit ice cube.

Distribution has branched out plenty since the treats hit the market in 2012. Jonny Pops are now sold at Holiday and Kwik Trip stations, park concession stands, and grocery stores including Kowalski's, Lunds, and Byerly's. Jonny Pops also made its way into the Minnesota State Fair this summer, selling its specially made Snelling Strawberry Rhubarb pops in the new West End Market.

Jonny Pops sales brew by about 100 percent from 2012 to 2013 and are on track to increase 400 percent this year. "A big reason why the business is such a fantastic opportunity is that people really love and believe in our product. Our story gets people interested in giving it a try," Wray says. "Then they keep coming back because of the taste and our simple, natural ingredients."

Next the partners will work on broadening distribution to other grocery store chains such as Cub, Target, and Coborn's, and expanding deeper into the Midwest. (The pops are available at some Illinois grocery stores.) New flavors also might be on the horizon, based on customers' requests for more variety. •

Everything Jonny Pops does is rooted in its mission to make the world a better place one pop at a time. From using all-natural ingredients in its popsicles to donating a portion of sales to charity, the recent St. Olaf College graduates who own Jonny Pops aim to make a difference.

The idea for Jonny Pops originated with CEO Erik Brust and his cousin, Jonathan, who wanted to create an all-natural frozen treat. Jonathan died in 2008, but Brust held on to their idea, proposing to his friends that they give it the old college try.

They started the company in 2012 while in their sophomore year at college. Using fellow students as guinea pigs, the team spent nearly two years refining

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# FINALISTS

## ENERGY/CLEAN TECH/WATER DIVISION

### Runner-Up: Pelican Lake Holdings

As a consultant in North Dakota's oil fields, Bob Anderson wanted to clean the water used during hydraulic fracturing ("fracking"). He started Pelican Lake Holdings to develop a machine that quickly filters sand and chemicals from water.

The vacuum filtration equipment also recycles dirty water from floods, train accidents, or industrial spills, and it washes out oil industry water tanks. Currently, tank cleaners must crawl inside through a 20-inch door. With this equipment, "they can wash it from the outside and do it better than they did before, then filter the water and reuse it," says Anderson, CEO, a farmer and self-taught inventor who has spent 30 years in the oil industry.

Ashby-based Pelican Lake manufactures its equipment domestically. It has sold several machines across the country, with oil companies in Texas also expressing interest. Anderson projects selling about 40 to 50 units in Pelican Lake's first year.

### Third Place: Friction Reduction

Reducing friction will be the next big frontier in making vehicles more energy-efficient, says Gary Pozarnsky, president and CEO of Friction Reduction in Minneapolis. It is developing a nanoadditive to lubricate engines, gears, and other moving parts.

Pozarnsky, who has a Ph.D. in chemical engineering, started working on this concept nearly three years ago. His capital-intensive research got a boost from two U.S. Army Small Business Innovation grants, in hopes that Friction Reduction might improve the safety and performance of its helicopter rotorcraft.

"It coats various gears and makes them slicked and easier to go against each other with very little friction," says Pozarnsky. The same principle applies to cars. "Just about

one-third of fuel in cars goes to overcoming friction in the system itself. Since cars are as light as they can be, friction reduction is where people are looking to increase performance and efficiency."

## FOOD/AG/BEVERAGE DIVISION

### Runner-Up: Locally Laid Egg Company

Shopping at his Duluth co-op, Jason Amundsen noticed there were no locally raised eggs. He didn't let his lack of experience with starting a business or raising chickens stop him from becoming an egg farmer. In 2012, he plowed ahead, purchasing 100 chickens and launching the Locally Laid Egg Company.

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**"It was a pretty brutal learning curve. Through all of our inordinate suffering, we found that customers really love the eggs."**

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— Jason Amundsen, co-owner,  
Locally Laid Egg Company

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"It was a pretty brutal learning curve," says Amundsen, who owns the Wrenshall company with his wife, Lucie, the marketing chick. "Through all of our inordinate suffering, we found that customers really love the eggs." When Amundsen delivered five cases of eggs

produced by his pasture-raised chickens, they would sell out by that afternoon.

First expanding distribution in Minnesota, Locally Laid now is building a network of farmers—especially Amish partners—to raise chickens to its specifications. ("They're really good at farming, but they struggle with Twitter," he says.) The company enjoys a burgeoning presence in four other states.

### Third Place: Punk Rawk Labs

While recovering from a car crash and struggling with an autoimmune disease that restricts her diet, Alissa Barthel started tinkering with making nut-based cheeses that she could eat. Barthel eventually started selling her dairy-free cheese at farmers' markets.

Sales took off quickly in 2011, locally and in New York—thanks to her blog—then across the country and internationally. Punk Rawk raised seed capital and opened a wholesale kitchen in Minneapolis where it produces cheeses made from cashews and macadamia nuts. A former microbiologist and trained raw-food chef, Barthel makes the cheese using fermented nut milk instead of animal milk.

The company is quickly filling its capacity in Minneapolis, but Barthel wants to grow slowly to keep quality high. "Reviews say that our cheese tastes the most like dairy," she says. "We're selling two times as much as we were at this time last year."

## GENERAL DIVISION

### Runner-Up: JenTra Tools

Key to installing a new door is making sure it's level. Door manufacturers know that their product often fails because it was not hung properly, and Travis Kelley should know. He worked in sales at a Minnesota manufacturer when he came up with a compact, easy-to-use level that helps people install doors more quickly and accurately.

Kelley and his wife, Jenn, started JenTra



Tools in Backus in 2011 to develop its Cheatah implement, improving on traditional six-foot levels that haven't changed much since the 1970s. Positive reviews helped JenTra sell 4,000 units without advertising.

Next JenTra will pitch manufacturers on including Cheatah with their doors. With an average of 40 million doors sold annually in the United States, that gives JenTra a big market, Kelley says. "Even if we make 25 or 50 cents on each tool," he says, "it's guaranteed revenue."

### Third Place: DocentEDU

High school science teacher Matt Nupen sought to do more to bring lessons to life for his students. He searched for a tool that would allow him to quickly insert videos or other content into electronic texts and couldn't find it. So he joined two other teachers to develop it.

**"It saves teachers a lot of time and helps them create the lessons they want to create."**

— Matt Nupen, co-owner of DocentEDU

After participating in a start-up weekend, they launched DocentEDU to provide a platform for teachers to easily create interactive lessons. With a few clicks, they can layer supplemental materials like discussion questions or photos into text. "It saves teachers a lot of time and helps them create the lessons they want to create," says Nupen. "Plus, it's easy and interactive for students to work through the lesson."

DocentEDU will offer free and premium versions, and it intends to market to teachers and school districts. Nupen expects to release a beta version this winter and the full version next spring.

## HIGH TECH DIVISION

### Runner Up: InfiniRAM

Stillwater-based InfiniRAM aims to use algorithms to turbo-charge the speed of databases. Serial entrepreneur Martin Fenner and his team developed software that predicts which data users will want next, based on their past actions. That means providing data 45,000 times faster and increasing database speeds up to 80 percent shortly after installation.

InfiniRAM will be available mainly for Oracle SAP and business intelligence databases—a \$100 billion opportunity that's growing 3 percent a year, says Fenner. Eventually, it will offer its technology for use on applications or software, too. "It's a 100 percent software solution that a lot of people prefer over hardware solutions. They don't have to worry about obsolescence," says Fenner. "We're also completely nonintrusive and we don't change any of the data."

InfiniRAM has been developing and refining its algorithm for the past two years and will start prototype testing with companies next year.

### Third Place: OMG Transit

New to the Twin Cities, Matt Decuir wanted easy access to real-time information about the bus schedule. He pitched his idea for a transit app at a civic hacking event and found several willing partners. They developed OMG Transit of Minneapolis to provide comprehensive, current data about local transit.

Users may set the app to alert them when their bus is coming, see if the train is on time, line up a Zipcar, or request an Uber—which combine to make it distinctive from other apps,

**"If you're waiting for the bus in the winter, you want to minimize the amount of time you're in the cold. And if the bus isn't coming soon, you want to know what your other options are."**

— Matt Decuir, owner, OMG Transit

Decuir says. "If you're waiting for the bus in the winter, you want to minimize the amount of time you're in the cold," he says. "And if the bus isn't coming soon, you want to know what your other options are."

The free app can be used on Apple or Android phones, and it's available in Chicago, Portland, Ore., and San Francisco.

## LIFE SCIENCE/HEALTH IT DIVISION

### Runner-Up: SpineThera

Seeking to ease people's back pain, Jeff Missling created a sustained-release injectable medication to improve upon existing steroid shots. He launched SpineThera to reformulate the generic epidural steroids commonly used today into a version that will release over six months or more.



# FINALISTS

That should eliminate about 40 percent of the injections done currently, which are repeat injections after the first shot didn't take, says Missling, CEO of the Plymouth-based pharmaceutical company. Using an extended-release version will reduce the overall cost of spinal injections by 28 percent while putting patients at less risk during repeat injections, he adds.

A chemical engineer, Missling first worked on sustained-release medication for eye diseases at another company. His physical therapist wife urged him to develop a similar treatment for back pain. SpineThera will continue developing its medication during the next two years, when it will go through clinical trials.

### Third Place: SynapseBLUE

Emergency room physician Matthew Barrett grew frustrated with time wasted getting staff and resources to the right places. He handed out iPads and iPods to text co-workers what he needed instead of having to physically look for them. And it worked so well he decided to turn

**“Almost everyone has visited an ER or urgent care and wondered why it’s taking so long. The patient experience and satisfaction is a big part of what we’re trying to improve.”**

— David Sullivan, co-owner, SynapseBLUE

his experiment into a business.

He enlisted his friend David Sullivan and another ER doctor to power up Excelsior-based SynapseBLUE. In the past two years, they developed software that makes medical practices more efficient through secure communication and workflow automation. By tapping an interactive dashboard, physicians can request that a tech to bring supplies to a room or coordinate care with a team of providers.

SynapseBLUE is testing its software at local ERs. “Almost everyone has visited an ER or urgent care and wondered why it’s taking so long,” says Sullivan, CEO. “The patient experience and satisfaction is a big part of what we’re trying to improve.”

### SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR DIVISION

#### Runner-Up: Twin Cities Mobile Market

For many low-income people, it's difficult to find fresh and healthy food close to home. They might live in a food desert or away from a bus line. Passionate about ensuring that everyone can get nutritious, affordable food, Leah Driscoll developed the Twin Cities Mobile Market.

Now part of the Wilder Foundation, the program converted a city bus into a grocery store on wheels. This fall, it started rolling into 16 St. Paul and Minneapolis sites carrying an inventory of fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy, meat, and canned goods at below-market prices.

Driscoll opted for a bus because it's familiar and gets participants inside. “Wilder research shows that your life expectancy directly correlates with what zip code you live in, and people who live in the poorest zip codes have the most diabetes and obesity,” Driscoll says. “Healthy, affordable food is a basic right no matter where you live.”

#### Third Place: Begins with a Dreamer

Begins with a Dreamer has a two-part mission: empowering young women and girls

to become leaders and entrepreneurs, while giving female artisans an outlet for their goods. Entrepreneur Joy McBrien and educator Kristi Hemmer started the organization this spring aiming to develop skills, self-reliance, and confidence in women of all ages.

The organization works with artisan groups in 15 countries, including Peru, India, and Ghana, guiding women on pricing,

**“If you have experience as a leader, entrepreneur and businesswoman as a young person, you believe in yourself and know you have the capacity to do it again.”**

— Joy McBrien, founder, Begins with a Dreamer

supply chain, and production. Local teenagers gain business skills by handling sales, marketing, and e-commerce for Begins with a Dreamer. It sells the artisans' jewelry, clothing, and accessories on its website and at pop-up stores.

“It helps girls build their confidence and get hands-on experience,” says McBrien. “If you have experience as a leader, entrepreneur, and businesswoman as a young person, you believe in yourself and know you have the capacity to do it again.”



# SEMI-FINALISTS

## STUDENT DIVISION

### Runner-Up: Tech Bank

When it's time to upgrade a smartphone, tablet, or computer, the inevitable next step involves finding a buyer for the old item. Tech Bank makes it convenient for people to sell their broken or unwanted devices at mall-based kiosks.

Started last fall by Austin White-Pentony, a University of Minnesota junior, Tech Bank operates locations in Roseville, Maplewood, St. Cloud, and Madison, Wis. Many cell phone companies refer customers to Tech Bank because it pays people right away. Tech Bank first evaluates the device, ensures it's not stolen, then gives customers a prepaid Visa card.

"We pay higher prices than the competition, we'll match other quotes, and we buy on the spot," says White-Pentony. "We typically turn around and resell the devices overseas, through online channels, and to wholesalers."

The company, with 20 employees, purchases about 800 items a month. It also buys used devices from business customers.

### Third Place: iLos Videos

iLos Videos streamlines the process of posting videos online, providing a seamless way for professors, trainers, and businesses to share information with large groups. Instead of repeating instructions for new hires or telling thousands of students how to register for classes, users make videos right in their web browser and replay them on a computer, tablet, or smartphone. They select whether the videos are private, public, or for a closed group

"There are programs to create videos, but there are so many steps," says co-founder Nick Stokman. "You have to make the video, edit it, save it to the computer, and upload it. It's not a time-saver to quickly teach someone to do something. With iLos, you record the video, and when you click the button it's posted online."

Stokman and two other University of St. Thomas graduates started the St. Paul company, offering three tiers of subscriptions.

## Energy & Clean Tech Division

**75F** – Deepinder Singh, Blue Earth County  
**AquaMedix, LLC** – Jan Jachimowicz, Hennepin County  
**Friction Reduction** – Gary Pozarnsky, Hennepin County  
**IHB Fuel Technology** – Hans Iverson, Hennepin County  
**LigSis** – Jason Kamau, Ramsey County  
**Magnetic Induction Heating System** – Ron Immerfall, Morrison County  
**MyRain** – Steele Lorenz, Scott County  
**Pelican Lake Holdings** – Robert Anderson, Grant County  
**The Green Habit** – Holly Chan, Hennepin County  
**Viroment** – Paul Koenig, Washington County

## Food, Agriculture & Beverage Division

**BDW Biotechnologies, LLC** – Adam Woodruff, Hennepin County  
**Cool Jerk** – Moli Kouanchao, Hennepin County  
**Dashfire Bitters** – Lee Egbert, Ramsey County  
**Fresh Bar** – William Handke, Hennepin County  
**Locally Laid Egg Company** – Jason Amundsen, St. Louis County  
**Mighty Axe Hops** – Eric Sannerud, Anoka County  
**Origin Meals** – Tyler Carson, Hennepin County  
**Philia Foods, LLC** – Mike Rakes, Hennepin County  
**Punk Rawk Labs, Inc.** – Alissa Barthel, Hennepin County  
**Trovita Health Science** – William Brown, Hennepin County

## General Division

**Blumen Tech** – Eddie Olson, Hennepin County  
**Collaps-a-tow** – David Lysaker, Otter Tail County  
**Corrometer** – Paul Jaeger, Ramsey County  
**DocentEDU** – Matthew Nupen, Washington County  
**FeelsWarm Heated Counterop Technology** – John Stopperan, Dakota County  
**InvolvEdu** – Joe Janiszewski, Hennepin County  
**JenTra Tools** – Travis Kelley, Cass County  
**Modiron** – Natalie Herrild, Dakota County  
**Terry Lloyd** – Megan Reinbold, Ramsey County  
**YOXO** – Jeff Freeland Nelson, Ramsey County

## High Tech Division

**Drive Power Smart Driving Mobile Solution** – Mike Moen, Hennepin County  
**Elevate** – Joe Stanton, Dakota County  
**EXO GAL** – Jeff Haagenstad, Dakota County  
**InfiniRAM** – Martin Fenner, Washington County  
**OMG Transit** – Matt Decuir, Hennepin County  
**OmniID** – Scott Johnson, Anoka County  
**Nexting** – Mark Daigle, Hennepin County  
**Scrapm, a yearbook on your phone** – Ryan Taylor, Hennepin County  
**SparkStarter** – Tony Kramer, Washington County  
**TransAuth** – Andrew Carlson, Ramsey County

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**iCareSoft** – Joseph Baron, Hennepin County  
**Fortiori Design, LLC** – Roger Schmitz, McLeod County  
**Learn To Live, LLC** – Dale Cook, Hennepin County  
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**curenci, LLC** – Dave Kuettel, Hennepin County  
**GoSolar! Kids** – Tyler Tracy, Hennepin County  
**Ground Truth Collaborative, LLC** – Kate Thompson, Ramsey County  
**Let's Talk Kids: Brain Builders, A Playing and Learning Kit** – Candi Walz, Chisago County  
**Picture Impact** – Anna Martin, Hennepin County  
**Pragati Palms** – Katrina Becker, Carver County  
**Twin Cities Mobile Market** – Leah Driscoll, Ramsey County  
**Verde Environmental and Medsaway** – Carter Anderson, Dakota County

## Student Division

**Tech Bank, LLC** – Austin White-Pentony, Hennepin County  
**Echo Spot** – Nadya Nguyen, Hennepin County  
**Endle** – Kurt Weber, Hennepin County  
**Yoga 2 Business** – Jessica Tjornehoj, Hennepin County  
**iLos Videos** – Sean Higgins, Crow Wing County  
**Jonny Pops** – Connor Wray, Rice County  
**Round Table Hops** – Erin Kayser, Hennepin County  
**PLUGZ** – John Holt, Hennepin County  
**Penguin Feet, LLC** – Andrew Ellingson, Hennepin County  
**U-Swap.org** – Nathan Shrader, Hennepin County

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