



NIACC Students Compete in Everyday Entrepreneur Pitch Competition

The NIACC Pappajohn Center hosted the Everyday Entrepreneurs Pitch Competition on November 13, 2023. The Everyday Entrepreneur Program is sponsored in conjunction with the National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship (NACCE), helping to provide access to entrepreneurial education and funding for students to take their businesses from an idea to a thriving enterprise.

This innovative event offers vital assistance to student entrepreneurs by helping them craft their initial business models, refine their pitching skills, and gain access to invaluable mentoring and funding opportunities. The competition was open to all NIACC students (including concurrent enrolled students). Seven students competed in the Semi-Finals on Monday morning. Five students advanced to the Finals, which were held Monday November 13 at 12pm, and presented their business pitches to a panel of judges.

The winners of the competition were:

First Prize \$1250 – *Bin Bladder*, Caleb Renner (Klemme, IA). Bin Bladder brings safety and ingenuity to your grain bin with an innovative alternative to bin sweeps.

Second Prize \$1000 – *Henna with Cat*, Catherine Dow (Clarksville, IA). Henna with Cat provides a comprehensive experience, bringing to light the beauty, cultural richness, and boundless artistic expression of henna.

Third Prize \$750 – *Kul Box*, Elic Fjetland (Clarion, IA). Kul Box is a mini insulated bag that helps prevent lip balm from melting in your car.

Honorable Mention \$500 – *FlipSight*, Josh Hanson (Joice, IA). FlipSight is an AI-driven solution that allows clients to flip with insight, profit with foresight.

Honorable Mention \$500 – *Rivera Tech*, Fabian Rivera (Rowan, IA). Rivera Tech provides trustworthy and cooperative service created to repair and service homeowners with HVAC units.

Semi-Finalist \$250 – *Mamba*, Gabriela dos Santos de Medeiros (Brazil).

Mamba is an aspirational apparel brand for athletes.

Semi-Finalist \$250 – *Prairie Education Agency*, Casey Zuehl (St. Ansgar, IA). Prairie Education Agency offers a self-paced education environment utilizing AI to gather material to develop the skills for the workplace

The judging panel included: Matt Curtis of Wayne’s Ski & Cycle (Mason City), Cathy Rottinghaus of First Citizen’s Bank (Charles City), and Molly Watson of Home Style (Mason City).

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Director's Notes

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Director
NIACC Pappajohn Center

Happy New Year! Our team recently participated in the State of North Iowa event, where featured speakers examined notable successes and identified key opportunities for advancing tourism, workforce development, overcoming childcare shortages, and overall growth opportunities for our region. It is truly amazing what we can accomplish with public-private partnerships! We commend the North Iowa Corridor Economic Development Group, Mason City Chamber, Clear Lake Chamber, and NIACC for their continuous efforts in developing and promoting our assets and region. Special thanks to Director Debbie Durham from the Iowa Economic Development Authority for gracing the event, celebrating the achievements of 2023, and highlighting an outstanding future filled with opportunity for all of North Iowa.

At the center of the discussion at the event was public-private partnerships. Collaborative public-private partnerships further amplify the significance of small business development and entrepreneurship in ensuring rural economic sustainability. These partnerships create synergies between government entities and private enterprises, fostering an environment conducive to business growth. Through joint initiatives such as those offered by our state and local economic development groups, resources can be pooled to provide essential infrastructure, access to capital, and training programs for aspiring entrepreneurs in rural areas. Additionally, public-private partnerships enhance the efficiency of regulatory frameworks and streamline bureaucratic processes, reducing barriers for new businesses. This collaborative approach not only stimulates economic growth but also promotes a more holistic and sustainable development model for rural communities. By leveraging the strengths of both sectors, public-private partnerships contribute significantly to the long-term viability and prosperity of small businesses in rural settings.

In North Iowa, small business growth and entrepreneurship are the heartbeat of our communities. Small business and entrepreneurship initiatives not only create jobs, opening doors for our neighbors and lowering unemployment rates but also form the very essence of our local communities. Here, small businesses serve as the lifeblood, providing vital goods and services, fostering a unique sense of community, and ensuring that our region thrives. We are committed to growing entrepreneurship and North Iowa is truly benefiting from these collaborative partnerships. Our future never looked brighter than it does right now!

Entrepreneur Spotlight

Jayson Ryner Wins Top Prize at 2023 InnoVenture Iowa Challenge

Jayson Ryner of Nora Springs, IA won the top prize at the 2023 InnoVenture Challenge on Wednesday, December 6. The InnoVenture Challenge invites Iowa entrepreneurs to participate in a pitch competition where three early-stage startup companies compete on-stage for a winner-take-all \$100,000 award.

Jayson Ryner is the founder of ReEnvision Agriculture and Instructor of Entrepreneurship at North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC). ReEnvision Ag, under Ryner's guidance, has emerged as a trailblazer in the agricultural sector, blending state-of-the-art technology with eco-friendly solutions. The company's mission is to reshape the future of farming by promoting environmental stewardship, resource efficiency, and forward-thinking practices and farmer profitability. ReEnvision Ag is at the forefront of revolutionizing agriculture through sustainable practices and cutting-edge technologies.

One of the driving forces behind Ryner's success has been the unwavering support from the NIACC John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center. Ryner said, "I am truly honored to receive the InnoVenture Challenge award. This achievement wouldn't have been possible without the support of NIACC and the NIACC Pappajohn Center, our investors, and families."

The Innoventure Challenge win serves not only as a recognition of Jayson Ryner's individual achievements but also as a celebration of the collaborative efforts that drive ReEnvision Ag's success. For more information about ReEnvision Ag, visit <https://reenvisionag.com>.

The InnoVenture Challenge is held by the InnoVenture Iowa Fund. InnoVenture Iowa Fund is the state's first publicly-funded venture capital fund. The state of Iowa received \$96 million in 2022 from the US Treasury as a part of the SSBCI funding made available to help states rebuild their economies in the wake of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. In concert with the Iowa Economic Development Authority and Bioconnect Iowa, InnoVenture Iowa was formally launched in October of 2022 and began making its first investments in November of that same year.



Billie Asmus Makes a Splash at Lowe's Into the Blue: Product Pitch Event

Billie Asmus of Repaint Studios in Hampton, IA made a splash at the 2023 "Into the Blue: Lowe's Product Pitch Event" held on December 5, 2023 in Charlotte, NC. Competitors traveled from around the world to compete in this global pitch competition after a rigorous application process. Asmus's invention, the Repaint Tray, received the largest purchase order in the Paint Department category. The Repaint Tray will be available in Lowe's stores across the nation and online in 2024. Repaint Studios is startup focused on reducing the environmental impact of home improvement with reusable, recyclable, and eco-friendly painting supplies. With its innovative design, entirely constructed in eco-friendly recyclable materials, the Repaint tray eliminates the need for single-use plastic paint tray liners.



In 2021, Asmus invented the Repaint Tray while running a small business refinishing and refurbishing furniture. Disappointed by the lack of sustainable products on the market, Asmus saw an opportunity to invent something entirely new. She filed a patent and enrolled in the Fall 2021 Venture School hosted by the NIACC Pappajohn Center in Mason City, an eight-week entrepreneurial training program. Asmus used this opportunity to perfect her product, market position, and business plan.

Asmus said, "When Lowe's announced the Repaint Tray as this year's Into the Blue winner for the paint department, I didn't believe it was real. The win is not only an incredible achievement that I'm extremely proud of, but it is also a testament to the Pappajohn Center and how they support entrepreneurs. I wouldn't have the pitching skills and experience without them."

North Iowa Mentor Spotlight



We are proud to introduce Ann Papoucis, a member of the Pappajohn Center’s Venture School Coach network and co-owner/operator of Northwestern Steakhouse. Ann and her husband Bill Papoucis, son of founder Tony Papoucis, are dauntless entrepreneurs who are continuing the Northwestern’s 104 year legacy. Northwestern Steakhouse first opened in 1920 as Pete’s Place, founded by Greek immigrants Pete Maduras and Tony Papoucis. The restaurant fed the hard working population of Mason City, with Tony serving t-bone steaks and fresh vegetables from his own garden. The Greek-inspired menu has changed little over the years, and still includes many of Tony’s original recipes. The Northwestern Steakhouse has created and maintained its status as one of the best steakhouses in Iowa for over 100 years. Its accolades include Most Iconic Restaurant in Iowa by Thrillist (2017). For more about the Northwestern Steakhouse, visit www.northwesternsteakhouse.com.



Ann and Bill Papoucis

Ann says, “Being a mentor with the NIACC Pappajohn Center Venture School Program has been uniquely exciting. The entrepreneurs, staff and other mentors have taught me more than I have given. Being a mentor is an enlightening and awe-inspiring opportunity. In the course of our 40+ years and the 102 years of the restaurant being in business, Bill and I have been through a lot. We have found that the customer relationship, food consistency and food prices are the most important aspects of our business and key to long term success. I believe fostering meaningful connections is essential for both personal and professional growth.”

The Pappajohn Center follows the mentor manifesto introduced Techstars®. Techstars® has a successful model for creating a culture of entrepreneurs and innovation, and for building a mentor network to support them. The next Venture School cohort is set for Spring 2024. If you are interested in volunteering to be a mentor, please contact Ashley Page at ashley.page@niacc.edu.

The NIACC CEO Club Takes on New Opportunities

The NIACC CEO Club took on new opportunities and challenges during the Fall 2023 semester. The NIACC CEO Club is a part of the national Collegiate Entrepreneurs Organization, and is open to currently enrolled NIACC students.

On November 2nd-5th, 2024, a group of six members from the NIACC CEO Club participated in the 40th National CEO Conference held in Tampa, Florida. The conference was hosted at the Grand Hyatt in Tampa Bay, Florida. During the National Conference, the NIACC CEO Club students seized valuable opportunities to engage with fellow young entrepreneurs, network with accomplished professionals from various industries across the United States, attend breakout sessions, and learn how to translate academic knowledge into real-world success.

The NIACC CEO Club occupies a unique position within the national organization. Unlike the majority of CEO clubs who are affiliated with universities or four-year institutions, the NIACC CEO Club represents a community college. Amidst the almost 100 chapters in attendance, our students only encountered two other clubs associated with a community college.

The NIACC CEO Club members continued to engage in entrepreneurial opportunities and community outreach through Fall 2023. The CEO Club ran a booth at the NIACC Marketplace during Global Entrepreneurship Week (November 13-17), and rang bells for the Salvation Army at HyVee in Mason City during the holiday season.

If you are a NIACC student interested in getting involved with the CEO Club, please visit www.pappajohncenter.com/ceo-club/ or email pappajohn@niacc.edu for more information.



Venture School Spring 2024

North Iowa entrepreneurs are achieving success with the assistance of the NIACC Pappajohn Center cohort of the University of Iowa Venture School. Venture School is the premiere business training program in Iowa, emphasizing real-world entrepreneurship and innovation based on a leading-edge curriculum. Participants learn to overcome the chaos and uncertainty of creating new ventures by conducting customer discovery, market research and developing their foundational business model in real-time.

Jayson Ryner of ReEnvision Agriculture in Nora Springs graduated from the North Iowa Venture School cohort in Fall 2019. Jayson took First Place and the top prize of \$10,000 at the statewide Venture School Launch Day pitch competition held during EntreFest 2020. In December 2023, he won First Place and the top prize of \$100,000 at the InnoVenture Challenge pitch competition. According to Jayson, one of the driving forces behind his success has been the support from the NIACC Pappajohn Center. Jayson says, “My experience during Venture School at NIACC propelled me to a successful launch of a dream. I have participated in a nationwide ag accelerator and an international business accelerator in Canada. What I learned during the Venture School at NIACC has propelled me through it all.”

The NIACC Pappajohn Center is now accepting applications for the Spring 2024 cohort of the University of Iowa Venture School program. The Spring 2024 program will begin with an in-person orientation session on Thursday, February 15, 2024. Classes will be held online via Zoom on Thursdays starting February 22 through April 4, 5:30-9:00pm. The program will culminate with the Venture School Launch Day pitch competition, held in-person at NIACC on Thursday, April 11, 2024. The cost for the program is \$299.

Participating teams will be eligible to compete for cash awards both locally and at the state level during the Venture School launch day at EntreFEST 2024. Last year’s North Iowa competitors won a total of \$7,000 in prize money during the 2023 EntreFEST pitch competition.

Contact Ashley Page at ashley.page@niacc.edu with questions or if you are a local entrepreneur interested in becoming a Venture School coach. To apply for the Spring 2024 cohort, visit www.venture-school.com and select the Mason City cohort in the drop-down menu. The deadline to apply is **February 5, 2024**.

Upcoming Events

Business Essentials February 1, 2024 | 5:30pm - 8:30pm | via Zoom | Cost: Free

Entrepreneurship Essentials is your guide to start mastering the fundamental aspects of business creation, financial management, and effective marketing strategies. Business Essentials delves into the critical steps required to turn your business idea into a reality. Explore the intricacies of starting a business, uncover the common pitfalls that lead to failure, and gain invaluable insights into what not to do. This session is the cornerstone of your entrepreneurial journey, offering practical guidance and expert advice to set you on the right path. [Registration is required.](#)

HR Foundations for Success: Navigating Start-up Growth with Strategic Human Resources Practices February 7, 2024 | 10:30am - 11:30am | NIACC | Cost: Free

As your business grows, you need a great team around you. Featured speaker Whitney Brierly, HR Director at CFO Systems LLC, shares how you can build a strong foundation for success by leveraging strategic human resources practices. The seminar will cover topics like: hiring, job descriptions, organizational charts, payroll, employee policies, and more. [Registration is required.](#)

TechTalk: A Viral Q&A February 27, 2024 | 5pm - 7pm | Mason City Brewing | Cost: Free

Join us at TechTalk for a behind the scenes Q&A session with Nic, aka the Fat Electrician, a North Iowa content creator and viral social media sensation. Participate in a wide-ranging conversation about going viral in North Iowa, social media tips and insights, and much more! Enjoy a free drink, new connections, and new ideas at TechTalk. [Registration is requested.](#)

Stay up to date with upcoming events at www.pappajohncenter.com/events/

Corporate Transparency Act Compliance

What is the Corporate Transparency Act? Effective January 1, 2024, most new and existing corporate entities in the United States will be required to file reports on their beneficial owners with Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (“FinCEN”) under the Corporate Transparency Act (“CTA”). Beneficial owners are generally defined as individuals who own or control an entity, either directly or indirectly, which includes individuals who own 25% or more of the company, or any individuals who exercise substantial control over the entity. The reporting rules are designed to prevent financial crimes, including money laundering, corruption, and tax evasion.

Although there are numerous exemptions from the reporting requirements, many small businesses will not qualify for an exemption and will need to report information on their beneficial owners.

What do you need to know? On January 10th, the NIACC Pappajohn Center partnered with BrownWinick Law Firm to present a CTA Compliance Seminar.


If you missed the CTA Compliance Seminar, you can still download the slide deck and can re-watch the recorded seminar online at the [Pappajohn Center website](#).



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