



Melissa Fabian recognized by America's SBDC Iowa with Special Entrepreneurial Award

The NIACC John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center and the North Iowa Area Small Business Development Center (SBDC) are proud to announce Melissa Fabian, Owner, Simply Nourished Market & Mercantile, as the winner of the 2024 Deb Dalziel Woman Entrepreneur Achievement Award winner.

The Deb Dalziel Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Award is presented by America's SBDC Iowa. The Deb Dalziel Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Award honors an Iowa woman entrepreneur who has significantly changed or improved her life and the lives of others. The award is presented in memory of Deb Dalziel, a devoted small business advocate who was director of the Small Business Development Center at Southeastern Community College, Burlington, from 1987 until her death from cancer in 1999, at the age of 44.

Brook Boehmler, Regional Director of the North Iowa Area SBDC, Mason City, nominated Fabian for the Deb Dalziel Award because, "Melissa has estab-

lished an extraordinary local and specialty food market. She ensures that Simply Nourished primarily sources its products from local businesses in an effort to build community morale and support. She is constantly showing her thoughtfulness and admiration for her community. Melissa is the pinnacle of what it means to be a small business in Iowa."

Melissa opened Simple Nourished Market & Mercantile in Mason City in 2020. Simply Nourished is a local and specialty food market, an old-fashioned neighborhood grocery store with a modern twist and a dedication to supporting local producers and filling food voids for people with food allergies or other dietary needs. Melissa is transforming downtown Mason City through meticulous customer discovery, innovative repurposing of space, and a far-reaching vision for revitalizing a rural Main Street district.

The SBDC special entrepreneur awards was presented at a ceremony on February 28, 2024, at 7:30 in the Legisla-

tive Dining Room of the Iowa State Capitol. After the presentation, Melissa was recognized on the floor of the Iowa House and Senate with a resolution marking the America's SBDC Iowa Special Entrepreneur Award winners for 2024.

For additional information about Melissa Fabian and Simply Nourished, visit www.simplynourishedstores.com

In This Issue

- 2 Directors Notes

- 3 Venture School Launch Day

- 4 Student Entrepreneurship

- 5 Youth Entrepreneurial Academy

- 6 Mentor Spotlight

- 6 Upcoming Events

- 7 2024 Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Gala

- 7 EntreFest 2024

- 8 Rural Economic Summit

- 8 Pappajohn SBDC Advisory Board Members



Director's Notes

Candi Karsjens, DBA
Director
NIACC Pappajohn Center

On July 11th, I had the honor of serving as a panelist in the Business Record's innovationIOWA Roundtable discussion on "Making Iowa an Innovation Leader." As I prepared for this event, I reflected on the key discussion questions. These have prompted me to consider not only what innovation and entrepreneurship mean for Iowa as a whole, but more specifically, their implications for North Iowa.

Developing a strong ecosystem for entrepreneurship and innovation in North Iowa is critical for driving transformative change across economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Innovation leads to new or improved services and products that enhance daily life, from advanced health services to more efficient ways of increasing commerce. By nurturing innovative thinking and entrepreneurial spirit, we can spur the emergence of new businesses and industries, significantly expanding job opportunities in our region. This dynamic environment will attract critical business investment and corporate funding, providing crucial financial support for startups, business growth, and expansion. Cultivating a diverse range of businesses and industries in North Iowa will strengthen the local economy by reducing reliance on specific sectors and enhancing overall economic resilience. This approach will also boost small businesses and startups, creating vibrant communities with varied economic opportunities and a dynamic cultural scene. Achieving this vision is a significant undertaking that will require the collective effort and engagement of all regional stakeholders, but I am confident that we are already making great strides towards success!

At the Pappajohn Center, we serve as a hub for entrepreneurs at all stages of their journey and we collaborate with various organizations and stakeholders to fulfill this vision. By leveraging collective assets, we expand the range and depth of services available to both aspiring entrepreneurs and established business owners throughout our region. Over the past year, we have been able to significantly enhance our support for entrepreneurship across all age groups. We've expanded our educational offerings, increasing the number and variety of workshops available to both student and adult entrepreneurs and adding two more area schools to our Entrepreneur 4 a Day (E4D) program.

Concurrently, we've seen a marked increase in successful funding outcomes, with both NIACC students and more established entrepreneurs securing more investments and grants. This dual approach of education and funding support has substantially strengthened our entrepreneurial ecosystem, fostering innovation and business growth throughout our region. Our strategic focus is on collaborating with local stakeholders to develop programs, workshops, and events that foster a vibrant entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem. We are committed to continuously improving and welcome any suggestions or discussions on areas where we can address gaps and enhance our efforts.

Spring 2024 Venture School Launch Day Competition

The NIACC John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center hosted the University of Iowa Venture School Launch Day competition on Thursday April 11, 2024. The NIACC Spring 2024 Venture School cohort competed in person after attending classes virtually for 7 weeks of training, customer discovery, and developing their business model alongside local entrepreneur coaches. A panel of judges selected First, Second, & Third Place winners. The judges were: Jordan Colby, Venture Analyst, Ag Ventures Alliance; Lindsay James, Executive Director of Visit Mason City & Main Street Mason City; and Rod Schlader, CEO (Retired) of MercyOne North Iowa.

First Place – Caleb Renner, *Renner Ag Solutions*, Klemme IA. Awarded \$1500 prize. Renner Ag Solutions saves farmers their fingers and their lives with the AgriNet. The AgriNet is a safe, innovative alternative to grain bin sweeps.

Second Place – Sherri Stensrude, *The PlayBarn*, Joice IA. Awarded \$1000 prize. The PlayBarn creates a secure, nurturing environment where kids can explore, learn, and push their boundaries safely. Not just a playground, The PlayBarn is also a space where parents can find community.

Third Place – Sarah Innis, *Journey Wellness*, Plymouth IA. Awarded \$500 prize. Good health is a lifelong journey. Journey Wellness helps people get in tune with their bodies so they can feel good, have energy, and live their best lives by using holistic, natural tools.

The Spring 2024 Cohort also included:

Eric Burt, EB Edits, Mason City IA. EB Edits helps real estate companies and business in North Iowa and Southern Minnesota who would like to showcase high-end properties or expand their company's vision by providing high-quality media solutions.

Virginia Hall, Hall's Homemade Kitchen, Hanlontown IA. Hall's Homemade Kitchen blends cherished family recipes with innovative creations. Their commitment to using only the freshest ingredients ensures that every bite is bursting with unforgettable flavor.

Eric Jellum, Jellum Geothermal, Osage IA. Jellum Geothermal is a grain drying system that taps into the vast pool of geothermal heat to help grain producers dry their grain safely at low temperatures while reducing or eliminating their reliance on fossil energy.

The University of Iowa Venture School is the premier statewide program for entrepreneurs and is built from a streamlined curriculum developed by the National Science Foundation I-Corps at Stanford University and the University of California, Berkeley. Venture School emphasizes real-world entrepreneurship and innovation based on leading edge curriculum. Teams will accelerate the startup process by testing their business model hypotheses immediately. They get out of the building to talk to customers, partners, and competitors, rather than relying on statistics and secondhand market research.



From Left: Eric Jellum, Sarah Innis, Eric Burt, Virginia Hall, Caleb Renner, and Sherri Stensrude

Applications are now open for the Fall 2024 Venture School cohort

Venture School is an opportunity for entrepreneurs to gain focus and clarity for their business idea and build their foundational business model. The Fall 2024 cohort begins on Thursday, September 19, 2024.

Learn more and apply at www.pappajohncenter.com/ventureschool/

NIACC Student Wins Top Prize at 2024 Pappajohn Student Entrepreneurial Venture Competition

North Iowa Area Community College student Catherine Dow was named one of the top three winners at The Pappajohn Student Entrepreneurial Venture Competition, sponsored by John Pappajohn, Equity Dynamics, Inc. Catherine was awarded one of three \$5,000 prizes. Catherine is currently a freshman at NIACC where she is studying Entrepreneurship & Small Business Management. She is also a member of the NIACC College Entrepreneur Organization (CEO) Club where she serves as Secretary.

The Pappajohn Student Entrepreneurial Venture Competition is held every spring and is open to Iowa university and college students, including private and community colleges, with an interest in starting their own business. A total of 15 student businesses competed as regional finalists selected from each of the five John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Centers: North Iowa Area Community College, Iowa State University, University of Northern Iowa, University of Iowa, and Drake University. The statewide finals were held at the University of Iowa Pappajohn Higher Education Center in downtown Des Moines on Monday, April 22, 2024. Each regional finalist was awarded \$500 if not selected for the top award.

The competition is a collaborative effort among the Iowa John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Centers located at Drake University, Iowa State University, North Iowa Area Community College, the University of Iowa, and the University of Northern Iowa. The competition was founded by John Pappajohn to help student entrepreneurs in pursuing their business ideas while at college in Iowa. Over \$300,000 has been awarded to student entrepreneurs over the last 20 years.

Instatat — Catherine Dow, North Iowa Area Community College (Clarksville, IA)

Instatat revolutionizes the tattoo industry by offering a user-friendly platform for semi-permanent tattoos, integrating advanced AI technology to instantly create the perfect design. Combining this innovative approach with premium materials like GPE, Instatat ensures vibrant and long-lasting designs without the lifelong commitment of traditional tattoos. This unique blend of AI and premium ingredients allows for easy customization, empowering individuals to express their authentic identities effortlessly and conveniently.

The other top three winners at the Pappajohn Student Entrepreneurial Venture Competition were Davan Crooker, DC Outdoor Services (University of Northern Iowa) and Joy Clark, Regain Orthotics (Drake University).

Regional winners from the NIACC Pappajohn Center were awarded \$500 for their business concepts on April 6, 2022 at NIACC. The NIACC regional winners are:

Renner Ag Solutions – Caleb Renner (Klemme, IA)

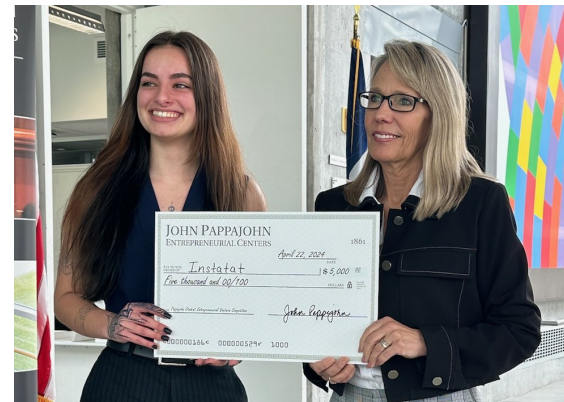
Renner Ag Solutions is a new start-up company aiming to add efficiency and safety to your farming operation. Renner Ag Solutions is developing an alternative to the bin sweep which will eliminate the need for farmers to enter the grain in during the clean-out process. This product is patent pending.

KÜLBOX – Elic Fjetland (Clarion, IA)

KÜLBOX is a lip care and cosmetic insulator device. Customizable, compact, and versatile product to protect your lip balm, sunscreen, or insulin. Leave it in the car, purse, or tackle box to make melted messes a problem of the past.



From left: Ashley Page, Caleb Renner, Erik Fjetland, Cat Dow, Candi Karsjens, Kelley O'Rourke



From left: Cat Dow and Candi Karsjens

The 2024 Youth Entrepreneurial Academy

The NIACC Pappajohn Center hosted the 2024 Youth Entrepreneurial Academy (YEA) in June. YEA is a free, one week academic camp offered annually to all North Iowa high school students interested in entrepreneurship. All students receive a \$500 NIACC scholarship from the John and Mary Pappajohn Foundation. The John K. and Luise V Hanson Foundation underwrites the prize money and the cost for students to attend the camp, making it free for all students to attend.

Throughout the week-long camp, aspiring entrepreneurs develop a business model canvas, an executive summary, financials (P&L and revenue), and a pitch deck. The pitches last from five-to-seven minutes each and are scored by a panel of local judges. Participating students benefit from entrepreneurial field experience and team-building activities. "I am always amazed at how much these young adults can accomplish in a week's time. It is remarkable and commendable," said Kelly O'Rourke, director of YEA and the School Partnership Entrepreneurial Coordinator for the NIACC John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center.

To celebrate the end of the week-long experience, the YEA students competed against their peers for a total of \$2,400 in cash prizes with each of the top three winners walking away with \$500 in prize money. Many of the camp participants come with an existing business concept in mind, something they can implement right away as high school students to create wealth for themselves and learn business skills, according to O'Rourke. "Some of the students are already doing their businesses prior to the camp but want to expand and learn more. Many come with an idea with the anticipation of launching a business following the camp. Some of these students attend NIACC in the career and technology or general education programs and participate in the college's CEO Club. They use the skills they acquired during YEA to continue their growth and compete in additional competitions," she said.

The students presented their businesses to a panel of three judges: Hunter Callanan; Spencer Stensrude, Ag Ventures Alliance; and Molly Watson, Home Style. The judges chose three businesses to win the top prize, with two honorable mention prizes of \$250 and four honorable mention prizes of \$100. The winners were:

Top Prizes:

Dessa Kiwacz and Reese Harrold, *AdVersa* - \$500 prize;
Casey Schilling, *K2 Enterprises*, \$500 prize; Chase Sorsenson, *Sub-Zero*, \$500 prize

Honorable Mention Prizes:

Brisa Argueta-Trujillo, *Frosted Home Baked Goods*, \$250 prize;
Fernanda Ramirez, *Ramirez Sister Renovations*, \$250 prize; Ian Carolus, *River City Retro*, \$100 prize; Isabella Garner, *Jeweled Stitches Crochet & Jewelry*, \$100 prize; Moon Gay, *The Kitty Corner*, \$100 prize; Brendan Walker, *Jacket Ink Games*, \$100 prize

The participants and schools represented were:

Brisa Agueta-Trujillo, Mason City High School; Ian Carolus, Mason City High School; Isabella Garner, Newman Catholic High School; Moon Gay, Mason City Alternative School; Reese Harrold, Mason City High School; Dessa Kiwacz, Mason City High School; Eric Pals, Mason City High School; Fernanda Ramirez, West Fork High School; Casey Schilling, Garner High School; Chase Sorenson, Forest City High School; Brenden Walker, West Fork High School.



From left, back row: Brendan Walker, Dessa Kiwacz, Isabella Garner, Casey Schilling, Moon Gay, Fernanda Ramirez, Eric Pals, Brisa Agueta-Trujillo, Cat Dow, Ashley Page. Front row: Reese Harrold, Kelley O'Rourke, Ian Carolus, Chase Sorenson.



From left: Brisa Agueta-Trujillo, Fernanda Ramirez, Dessa Kiwacz, Reese Harrold, Isabella Garner, Brenden Walker, Moon Gay, Chase Sorenson, Casey Schilling, and Ian Carolus.



North Iowa Mentor Spotlight

David Zrostlik, President, Stellar Industries, Inc.

We are proud to introduce David Zrostlik, a member of the Pappajohn Center's Venture School Coach network and President of Stellar in Garner and Mason City, IA. Stellar was founded in 1990 by three ambitious entrepreneurs: Francis Zrostlik, Jim Vlaanderen and Gary Bomstad. Stellar began as the first U.S. corporation to design and manufacture a domestic hydraulic hooklift hoist. Stellar has added the design and manufacturing of numerous products for an ever-expanding lineup of market-leading equipment. Stellar is now in its second generation of leadership under the helm of David Zrostlik with more than 800 employees, and is now 100% employee owned through Stellar's Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). David has volunteered as a mentor through the Venture Mentor Network for over two years.

The NIACC Pappajohn Center has several opportunities available for mentorship. If you are interested in volunteering to be a mentor, please contact Ashley Page at ashley.page@niacc.edu.

Upcoming Events

TechTalk July 23, 2024 | 5:00pm - 7:00pm | Lake Time Brewery, Clear Lake | Cost: Free

Young professionals take on technology in an interactive panel discussion, sponsored by Stellar Industries, Inc. Attendees receive a free beverage and are invited to order from the Getting Toasted Food Truck. [Registration is requested.](#)

Facebook Ads Webinar July 24, 2024 | 1:00pm - 2:00pm | Online via Zoom | Cost: Free

Unlock social success by maximizing your Facebook & Instagram ads. Discover how to maximize the impact of targeted ads in this free online workshop led by Jennifer Gilbert, Owner & Marketing Strategist, Remio Group. [Registration is required.](#)

TechTalk August 27, 2024 | 5pm - 7pm | Lake Time Brewery | Cost: Free

Sponsored by CL Tel. More information coming soon!

Business Essentials September 5, 2024 | 1:00pm - 2:00pm | Online via Zoom | Cost: Free

Are you ready to embark on a journey toward entrepreneurial excellence? The NIACC Pappajohn Center and SBDC proudly present a transformative 3-part series designed to equip aspiring entrepreneurs, business beginners, and those seeking to revitalize their entrepreneurial endeavors. Begin your journey with Business Essentials and discover the critical steps required to turn your business idea into a reality. [Registration is required.](#)

Venture School Begins September 19, 2024

Apply at www.venture-school.com by September 12, 2024

TechTalk September 24, 2024 | 5pm - 7pm | Lake Time Brewery | Cost: Free

Sponsored by CL Tel. More information coming soon!

Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Gala October 3 | NIACC

Join us for an evening of celebration in honor of North Iowa's entrepreneurs. Learn more at www.pappajohncenter.com/gala

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

The Pappajohn Entrepreneur Gala

The 2024 Pappajohn Entrepreneur Gala will celebrate North Iowa's entrepreneurs and present the 2024 Legacy Award. Learn more or apply for the 2024 Entrepreneur Awards at www.pappajohncenter.com/gala



EntreFest 2024

Caleb Renner of Klemme, IA, took home Third Place at the 2024 University of Iowa's Venture School Launch Day on June 13, 2024. Ten teams from across the state of Iowa competed in the event which was held at EntreFEST, a two-day entrepreneurial conference in Cedar Rapids, IA. A total of \$37,000 in prize money was awarded.

Caleb Renner won the Third Place prize of \$6,000 for his business, Renner Ag Solutions, and his invention, the AgriNet. The AgriNet provides a safe alternative to grain bin sweeps, eliminating the need for farmers to enter the grain bin during the clean-out process and saving both lives and limbs. Caleb is currently a student at NIACC. He is a graduate of the Venture School program at the NIACC John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center and has previously won 1st Place at the Spring 2024 North Iowa Cohort Venture School competition. Caleb was also a regional winner at the 2024 Pappajohn Student Entrepreneurial Venture Competition.

Candi Karsjens, Director of the NIACC Pappajohn Center, said, "EntreFest is such a great culminating event to celebrate the best Venture School graduates from across Iowa and really celebrates the spirit and culture of entrepreneurship in Iowa. Our participants did a fantastic job pitching their business ideas and representing North Iowa and the culture of entrepreneurship of our region."

Candi Karsjens was also recognized at University of Iowa's Venture School Launch Day with the Tom Trone Mentor of the Year award.

At the 2024 Venture School Statewide Launch Day, First Place (\$15,000) was awarded to Act Write Here, (Laney Kraus-Taddeo). Second Place (\$9,000) went to Tumbleweed (Paul Richardson). Two finalists, EHS Support Source (Linden Terpstra) and Site Sidekick (Tom Altman), and five semifinalists, received \$1,000 each. The semifinalists are Invasive Removal (Mark Vande Haar), Ossarocco, LLC (Osarodion Aigbogun), Roster (Steve Wittmer), Steer Clear Mirrors (Courtney McClellan), and The LEGG Buddy, LLC (Gary Goodlett).



Caleb Renner presents at EntreFest 2024

NIACC Pappajohn Center Hires John Rosenfeld as Small Business Counselor

The NIACC Pappajohn Center welcomes John Rosenfeld as Small Business Counselor for the Pappajohn Center and the North Iowa Area Small Business Development Center (SBDC). John comes to NIACC after over 30 years of business experience in Colorado managing several successful small businesses. After selling his own business of 26 years, John helped two other industry entrepreneurs prepare their businesses for sale. He has a strong background in creating successful business systems and processes that produce highly profitable results. John received a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture from Colorado State University.



John and his wife, Cherish, enjoy caring for animals, hiking on area trails, and volunteering at local organizations.

Save the Date: Rural Economic Development Summit



Pappajohn Center Staff



Candi Karsjens, DBA
Director, John Pappajohn
Entrepreneurial Center



Brook Boehmler
Director, North Iowa Area
Small Business
Development Center



Ashley Page
Director, Entrepreneurship
Programs & Client Success



Kelley O'Rourke
School Partnership
Entrepreneurial
Coordinator



Joyce Martin
Marketing & Community
Relations Manager

Pappajohn & SBDC Advisory Board

Beth Bilyeu
Forest City EDC

Joe Davis
NIACC Business, Humanities,
Human & Public Services
Division Chair

Stacy Doughan
Clear Lake Area Chamber of
Commerce

Chris Garden
L&J Industries

Patti Hanson
NIACC Continuing Education
Dean and Director of
Economic Development

Bob Klocke
First Citizens Bank

Melissa Michaelis
Winn-Worth Betco

Ronnie Pitzen
Retired Businessman

Natalie Plagge
Clear Lake Bank & Trust

Jayson Ryner
NIACC Business Instructor

Chad Schreck
North Iowa Corridor EDC

Dr. Steven Schulz
NIACC President

Spencer Stensrude
Ag Ventures Alliance

Ted Vosburg
Retired Businessman

Rick Whalen
Retired Businessman

Jamie T. Zanios
Business Consultant