

For Immediate Release

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Alabama Launchpad to Celebrate State's Innovation Economy's Job Creation

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. – Sept. 17, 2013: Celebrating Alabama's job creation successes and helping startups advance to the next level will be the focus of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama Foundation's Third Annual Alabama Launchpad Innovation and Entrepreneurship Conference set for Sept. 26-27 at the Hyatt Regency Birmingham-The Wynfrey Hotel in Hoover.

The conference will feature speakers including Brad Feld, co-founder of TechStars, a mentorship-driven accelerator startup; William C. Taylor, editor of Fast Company, a full-color magazine that focuses on technology, business and design; Andrew Chang, corporate marketing director for small business and consumer segment; and Samford University's Brock School of Business graduate Ted Alling, a Vestavia Hills native who is named as one of the South's leading young entrepreneurs.

Gov. Robert Bentley, who has stressed the importance of entrepreneurship and innovation for jobs in his recent economic recovery tours, will speak on Friday, Sept. 27 at 8 a.m.

"The conference is about learning to celebrate the small successes that collectively drive an innovation economy," said Angela Wier, an EDPA vice president. "For instance, if you look at the early-stage companies in the state that have been successful in bringing in Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) funding, individually, they may have 13, 50 or 78 jobs, but when you aggregate them, they create over 2,100 jobs. The state's incubators are responsible for the creation of more than 6,200 jobs."

For the first time, the conference will recognize the job creation contributions of incubators, eight research universities, Angel networks, along with top leaders in patent awards and 35 companies that landed Small Business Innovation Research grants for being high-wage job creation catalysts in the state. Plaques will be presented.

"There are many players that are important to the innovation economy, and we are trying to make sure we highlight their good work and draw attention to it," Wier said.

This year's conference, the only kind in Alabama, also will feature a Start-Up Village, where entrepreneurs, investors and mentors can network.

Greg Sheek, Alabama Launchpad programs director, said the Start-Up Village was added to meet the demand for exposure that startups crave to connect with potential investors and potential customers.

“We also believe there is strong value in getting entrepreneurs together to learn from one another and explore new partnerships either formally or informally as peer to peer,” Sheek said. “We are giving entrepreneurs from across the state the chance to meet and mingle with one another and a broader statewide audience.”

Bill Taylor, EDPA president, said the conference aligns with the Renewal component of the state’s strategic economic development plan, Accelerate Alabama, by reinforcing the state’s avenue for creating high-wage careers that will sustain future economic viability

The conference is being held in conjunction with Alabama Launchpad’s Seventh Annual Start-Up Competition. Five startups that were chosen from nine in July will make final pitch presentations at 9 a.m. on Thursday, Sept. 26 before a panel of five judges in hopes of winning a share of up to \$100,000 in prize money. The Launchpad winners will be announced on Friday, Sept. 27, during the conference’s noon luncheon.

Sheek said the conference is designed for entrepreneurs; startups; incubator leaders; patent generators; Small Business Innovation Research-funded companies; the startup investment community; and economic and community developers working to build small business in their communities.

The costs for the conference are: \$150 for entrepreneurs; \$ 250 corporate; and \$90 students.

About Alabama Launchpad: *Alabama Launchpad is a program of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama Foundation. Alabama Launchpad is committed to engaging and developing Alabama’s innovation ecosystem through a competition that accelerates the development of new ventures, an annual conference and activities that promote Alabama technologies available for commercialization and licensing.*

About the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama: *In its 22nd year, the Partnership represents the private sector’s contribution to economic development in Alabama. EDPA is a private, non-profit organization funded by more than 80 leading companies committed to the state’s long-term economic success. EDPA provides leadership and services that recruit new businesses to the state, retain existing business and renew Alabama’s economy by fostering innovation both within existing industries and through the commercialization of new technologies.*

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