

ALABAMA LAUNCHPAD WINNERS

Birmingham companies take home the majority of Alabama Launchpad winnings, taking the winnings for local startups in the competition up to nearly \$500,000 since 2012.

By Lauren Cooper

Four Birmingham companies received \$163,387 in seed funding in the Alabama Launchpad startup competition.

Governor Robert Bentley announced five recipients statewide of more than \$250,000 in funding during the annual Alabama Launchpad Innovation and Entrepreneurship Conference in Birmingham in September.

The Alabama Launchpad conference was part of the inaugural Innovation Week Birmingham (see page 20). Each of the Birmingham companies participated in the Spark mentoring and coaching program, which is coordinated by the Birmingham Business Alliance for each round of Alabama Launchpad.

Birmingham companies that received funding were:

- Cheeriodicals, which received \$43,250. The company provides personalized gift boxes, containing magazines and other items and is led by Mary Martha Parish.
- Healthfundit, which received \$15,000. Healthfundit is a crowd engagement platform for medical research and biotechnology and led by Larry Lawal.
- QuickTrick, which received \$16,000. The company provides portable and compact alignment measurement systems and is led by Tess Winningham.
- Smart Party, which received \$89,137. Smart Party provides tools for nonprofit organizations to increase event revenue and expand donor base and is led by Brooke T. Battle.

Spectracyte, a spectral imaging solutions provider for research microscopy and clinical endoscopy that is affiliated with the University of South Alabama in Mobile, received \$87,000.

Since 2012, Birmingham companies have received more than \$487,000 in funding from the Alabama Launchpad startup competition and many of those companies took part in the BBA's Spark mentoring and coaching program.

"The Spark mentoring and coaching program has not only helped 12 Birmingham startups win close to \$500,000 in cash awards from Launchpad to date, but it has created a platform for Birmingham entrepreneurs to more effectively connect with some of the community resources available to them," said Steven Ceulemans, vice president of innovation and technology for the Birmingham Business Alliance. "The Spark program really leverages the key BBA asset, its broad business community network, to increase Birmingham awareness of the Launchpad program, and it connects applicants with seasoned industry mentors to get mentoring and coaching support with their business plan and pitch presentation used to compete in the Launchpad start-up competition. As a result the number of Birmingham applications, the number of winners from our community, and the growth trajectory that some of the companies have been able to achieve after Launchpad have never been higher."

The Alabama Launchpad conference, which was coordinated by the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, attracted about 300 people from around the state to hear speakers that included Governor Robert Bentley, Brandon Byrne of Curse and Peter H. Diamandis, chairman and CEO of the X Prize Foundation.

The 2014 Alabama Innovation Awards were also given out, recognizing the accomplishments of businesses, institutions and people who impact Alabama and its economy through innovation. Award winners included: Inventor of the Year, Emil Jovanov of the University of Alabama in Huntsville; Outstanding Product or Service, Conversant Bio; Outstanding Woman or Minority in Innovation, Gwen Fewell, co-founder and chief commercial officer of TransOMIC Technologies Inc.; Corporate Innovator of the Year, Atherotech Diagnostics Lab;



Birmingham Alabama Launchpad winners and their BBA Spark mentoring team, from left to right, Steve Ceulemans, BBA; Larry Lawal, Healthfundit; Gary and Mary Martha Parish, Cheeriodicals; Tess Winningham, QuickTrick; Brooke Battle, Smart Party; and Victor Brown, BBA.

Outstanding Startup Business, BLOX LLC; Startup Executive of the Year, life-long entrepreneur Michael Chambers; Outstanding University/College-Corporate Partnership, iK9 and Auburn University; and Lifetime Achievement Award, Lonnie S. McMillian, co-founder of ADTRAN Inc. and the HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology. ▶

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