

BUSINESS MONDAY MARCH 27, 2016 8:33 PM

Youth business plan contest season in full swing

HIGHLIGHTS

South Florida private schools faced off, with Gulliver’s team taking home the win

School contests for the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship are underway, and the top two winners will compete in the nationals

Miami Dade College’s InterAmerican Campus is holding a high school contest as is Palm Beach County’s YEA!, and the Miami Herald Business Plan Challenge deadline nears



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It's spring, and entrepreneurship is in the air at South Florida high schools.

Paula Ceballos, Lucie Gibeau and Emma Guitar believe they have a better way to feed vitamins to your dog. Vita-Pet's all-natural proprietary vitamin formula can be added to the dog's water without changing the taste.

"We are going to target Miami-Dade County, so that is approximately 441,000 dog-owning households. ... By our fifth year we will expand to other animals and to other regions," the team said in its presentation to judges.

These girls from Gulliver Preparatory not only came up with the winning business plan, but they have a formulation in the works. Ceballos has been working on it with vets over the past year as part of Gulliver's biomedical program. The judges hit them with questions about regulatory requirements, the competition and financials but in the end were impressed: Team Vita-Pet took home the big win at the South Florida Business Plan Competition earlier this month.

Jason Meisel, Joshua Berger, Jacob Zipper and Andre Radensky from Pine Crest School came in second for their company concept, Drop Lt, which monitors your water usage and gamifies water conservation methods, while Emma Ronzetti and Laura Zaidenberg of Ransom Everglades took third for Access Able, an app that provides information and reviews by and for people with disabilities about restaurants and other public venues.

Teams from Christopher Columbus High School and Miami Country Day School also competed in the contest among five South Florida private schools. The annual event benefits the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE), which teaches entrepreneurship and business skills to about 3,000 at-risk students in Miami-Dade and Broward.

"Our hope is to grow this and expand this event to many schools throughout Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties and make this a great event for our community," said Richard Jackson, who is on the advisory board of NFTE and helped produce the five-school contest that culminated in the presentations at Miami Dade College's Idea Center.

While the South Florida Business Plan Competition wrapped up, NFTE's contest is just getting underway. Students are taking the stages at their respective schools, competing for the chance to represent their school in the regional competition and finals on May 26. A few of the school competitions have already taken place, with the rest scheduled over the next few weeks.

Kaitlyn Smith of Coral Gables Senior High School won her school's contest. She created Candidly Kait, which is an ad-supported blog focused on fashion and beauty, to help young women improve their self-esteem by showing how every woman is beautiful. Eboni Cobb of iTech @ Thomas A. Edison Educational Center was also a winner for her T-shirt line called HELP, in which proceeds will go youth education programs in her native Ghana with the goal of alleviating poverty.

Each school winner will advance to the regional competition on May 26 at the Idea Center at MDC, where they will compete in a semi-final round. From that group, judges will select the five finalists who will participate in the final round. Each of the five finalists will receive between \$350 and \$1,500 in seed capital for their businesses, and the top two winners will compete in the national competition in the fall. And that's not all: NFTE alumni who participated in the summer entrepreneurship program will be showcased and will compete at the eMerge Americas conference in April.

On Tuesday, MDC's InterAmerican Campus' School of Business and School of Education will host their first annual Executive Pass Shark Tank. In this business plan competition, business students at Miami Senior High will compete against education students from Miami Coral Park Senior High. All six business plans created by the high school seniors are proposed entrepreneurial endeavors related to education. The members of the winning team will receive \$500 each for tuition to use at MDC, and the winners of the best presentation will return to their school with a trophy.

On Wednesday, budding entrepreneurs will pitch their business concepts to the Young Entrepreneurs Academy! (YEA!) Investor Panel at Keiser University in West Palm Beach. The panel will be hosted by Palm Beach County Community Foundation, the nonprofit arm of the Central Palm Beach County Chamber of Commerce, and YEA! is their after-school entrepreneurship program for middle and high school students. Judges are set to distribute \$10,000 among the businesses. The event is open to the public: go to cpbchamber.com.

These are just a few of the many business competitions. The Miami Herald's Business Plan Challenge is in full swing too, with a track just for high school students (eighth graders are welcome to compete, too). The deadline is April 4, and entries should be emailed to highschoolchallenge@miamiherald.com (see additional information below).

We look forward to seeing all the interesting plans from South Florida's next generation of entrepreneurs and business leaders, and we'll be giving our Business Plan Challenge winners and finalists a big splash in the Miami Herald on May 9. Good luck!

Follow Nancy Dahlberg on Twitter @ndahlberg.

HOW TO ENTER THE CHALLENGE

Procrastinators, take note: The deadline to enter the Community Track or FIU Track of the Business Plan Challenge is Monday night; high school students have one more week. Don't worry, you are in good company; most of our entries come in on the last day. Here is your quick guide to entering your business or concept:

Who can enter: Entrepreneurs with businesses less than 2 years old or with business ideas. There is a community track, FIU track and high school track.

What to enter: Up to a three-page business plan (one additional page for charts or photos allowed).

Entry deadline: 11:59 p.m. March 28 for the Community and FIU Tracks; The High School Track deadline is 11:59 p.m. April 4.

Email entries to: Challenge@MiamiHerald.com (for the community track), FIUchallenge@MiamiHerald.com or to highschoolchallenge@MiamiHerald.com. You should get a confirmation your entry was received. If you do not get a confirmation, please email ndahlberg@miamiherald.com so that we can ensure your entry makes it to us.

Contest rules, other info: MiamiHerald.com/challenge

Questions: ndahlberg@miamiherald.com

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