



**News release**

November 21, 2017

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### **Youth entrepreneur wins highest seed grant in accelerator business pitch contest**

Alex Upendo of Build-a-Bow won the Gateway Technical College Launch Box business pitch competition held today in the auditorium of the SC Johnson integrated Manufacturing and Engineering Technology Center, 2320 Renaissance Blvd. and will receive a \$5,000 seed grant for his company.

Upendo's company specializes in tailored bow ties and service to the community.

"I thought it was a great competition and the 12-week cohort was very helpful. I got useful information and it was just awesome," said Upendo.

Upendo said the program helped him to better pinpoint his target market and make some changes to the price point of his products.

With tools and skills gained through an intense, 12-week business mentoring program, entrepreneurs competed for seed grants by making a 4-minute pitch to a panel of judges.

Erin Magennis, owner of CalmLet, a business that produces a wellness tool aimed at college female freshmen to regulate anxiety, won second place, and received a \$4,000 seed grant.

Alexander Ersing and Pablo Davalos-Alonso of Mt. Sinai Gym, a business seeking to break the mold of cookie-cutter corporate gyms through a gym offering a sense of community and differing exercise options, took third and received a \$3,000 seed grant.

Seth Muller of Muller Motors, and Kristina Watanabe and Lisa Aguilar of Wings of Fire, were runners-up and will each receive a \$2,500 seed grant. Muller Motors is a company aimed at building an affordable electric car, while Wings of Fire is a wellness coaching company focused on women entrepreneurs.

The entrepreneurs are part of Gateway's Launch Box Accelerator Program, an effort to help them to start or grow their business.

"This group was so committed to excelling, and so committed to helping each other. That's what's supposed to happen with an accelerator," said Thalia Mendez, business resource specialist with Gateway's Business and Workforce Solutions Division.

"The accelerator program provides a means for entrepreneurs to really focus. A lot of times, an entrepreneur comes in with a big idea but without the focus of being able to realistically do it. This helps them to narrow their focus and succeed."

For more information, please contact Thalia Mendez at (262) 898-7404.

Gateway Technical College collaborates with communities in Kenosha, Racine and Walworth counties to ensure economic growth and viability by providing education, training, leadership and technological resources to meet the changing needs of students, employers and communities.

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