

Tucson Citizen

UA student innovators meet investors

Camera phone lens, rural solar fields among 6 ideas to get chance at financing

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Student exhibitors at Tuesday's University of Arizona Innovation Showcase hoped to pitch their business plans to angels - the financial type, not the heavenly host.

Angels - investors who seek startup ventures to fund - from Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and California attended, scouring the aisles to find the next great breakout business ideas.

The student entrepreneurs were eager to connect with them for advice, guidance and - hopefully - funding.

The group selected six UA teams to present their plans in greater detail following the showcase.

"There were two or three investable companies in there today," said John Chavez, president of New Mexico Angels in Albuquerque.

But no checks would be written Tuesday, he said, since due diligence to validate the companies, people, technology and intellectual property would take from six weeks to three months.

The student entrepreneurs were on their toes.

"We have to assume that everyone is a prime customer," said Kerissa Kelly-Slatten, marketing manager for Cookie Fusion, a company that bakes in four to six minutes custom cookies from a wide variety of ingredients.

"We have to persuade them, convince them, that we have a strong plan and a strong team to open the business," she said. Her team is seeking \$750,000 to open its first store.

The six companies selected to give formal presentations were: Cookie Fusion; LenSense, which offers flat liquid crystal diffractive lenses for zoom optics in camera phones; FireGuard Industries which offers an aerator that fits between a fire hose and nozzle that allows firefighters to put out fires 40 percent faster with 50 percent less water; uBike, an automated bicycle rental kiosk for short-term commutes; Renewabuilt Energy, which plans to build solar fields to meet the needs of rural communities; and SystemGreen, which recycles shipping containers into affordable, stylish and environmentally friendly housing.

Emre Toker of Tucson's Desert Angels said he was impressed with the entrepreneurship and thoroughness displayed by the students.

"Some of them piqued my interest to look at them in more detail," Toker said.

Brian Miller, a UA optical sciences student, received the \$1,000 student technology innovation award at a luncheon before the showcase event. He was recognized for his research in medical imaging technology.

Jay F. Nunamaker Jr., UA Regents' Professor in Management Information Systems, received the \$10,000 technology innovation award for developing computer-assisted human detection technology.

Henry Koffler, UA president emeritus, was honored with the lifetime achievement award for his work improving UA's research capability while he was president of the university.
