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CT STATE HOUSATONIC'S WERTH CENTER FOR INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP ANNOUNCE WINNERS OF 2ND ANNUAL ENTREPRENEUR ELEVATOR PITCH COMPETITION STUDENT ENTREPRENEURS AWARDED \$12,000 IN CASH PRIZES

Bridgeport, CT- The Housatonic Community College Foundation, in collaboration with the Werth Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Housatonic, is excited to announce winners of the 2nd annual Entrepreneur Elevator Pitch Competition. This event hosted on April 25th showcased the best of student entrepreneurial talents across the state.

Thanks in part to a partnership with the National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship (NACCE) Everyday Entrepreneur program, this competition provided an excellent opportunity for students enrolled in any of the twelve Connecticut State Community College campuses to pitch their business ideas to a panel of judges and compete for over \$12,000 in prizes.



This event not only provides financial support but also a platform for students to gain valuable feedback on their business ideas, connect with industry professionals, and further their entrepreneurial ambitions. The Werth Center at Housatonic plays a pivotal role in sponsoring and supporting this enriching student experience. Launched in 2022 with a million-dollar gift from Peter Werth, philanthropist and Founder, CEO, President, and Chairman of ChemWerth, Inc., this resource helps students launch and grow their small business.

After a preliminary round of 60-second video submissions, 20 student finalists presented their businesses to the panel of judges including Julian Pierce, Director, Economic Opportunity at Fairfield County's Community Foundation, Gwendolyn Brantley, Founder and Executive Director of ACCESS Educational Services, Inc., and Ricardo Vidal, Director of Lending for the Community Economic Development Fund.

Students enthusiastically pitched their business ideas which focused on food services, unique book publishing, specialized accounting services, custom embroidery, hair care, tech and equipment rentals, and more. All twenty student finalists received \$100, and the winning eight student presenters included the following:

- First place winner of \$2,500- Aileen Berrios Ramos from CT State Asnuntuck for her business Berrios Accounting Services
- Second place winner of \$1,750- Elizabeth Soderholm from CT State Housatonic for her business Textile Tattoos
- Third place winner of \$1,500- Shian Earlington from CT State Asnuntuck for her business Vendii
- Fourth place winner of \$1,250- Tiffany Blackwell from CT State Housatonic for her business CRE-A-TIFF WRITES
- Fifth place winner of \$1,000- Matthew Kodnia from CT State Housatonic for his business The Dancing Jerk
- Sixth place winner of \$750- Andreas Menegatos from CT State Housatonic for his business Phrygian Beats Music
- Seventh place winner of \$500- Sarah Amato from CT State Housatonic for her business Grapevine Botanicals
- Eighth place winner of \$250- Evan Smith from CT State Tunxis for his business Van Anthony's Steakhouse

“We are proud to host this meaningful event that spotlights the exceptional entrepreneurial skills of CT State Community College students,” stated Kristy Jelenik, Executive Director of Housatonic Community College Foundation. “The cash prizes offer winners a tangible reward to move their business idea forward. Overall, the competition provided students with valuable feedback, networking opportunities, and a chance to realize their professional goals. With support from the Werth Center, our students are empowered to achieve their small business dreams.”

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About the Housatonic Community College Foundation:

The Housatonic Community College Foundation supports educational excellence and innovation at Housatonic Community College. Through scholarships, faculty development, and funding of special projects, the Foundation empowers students to pursue quality education and training. Learn more: www.HousatonicFoundation.org

About the Werth Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship:

Established in 2022, the Werth Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at CT State Housatonic supports entrepreneurial efforts among students and community members. Funded by Peter Werth and the college foundation, the Center features a Makerspace and members benefit from individualized business coaching, workshops, marketing tools and more. They can also compete for grants and promote their products through pop-up shops and monthly pitch competitions.

About NACCE:

The National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship (NACCE) is a non-profit organization founded in 2002 at Springfield Technical Community College in Massachusetts. NACCE supports community college leaders and educators through conferences, webinars, a biweekly newsletter, a quarterly journal, podcasts, and other resources. It promotes an entrepreneurial mindset and provides practical tools and curriculum to enhance entrepreneurship education in classrooms and communities.