

CONTACT

Michael Berman
DLBA Communications Manager
Michaelb@dlba.org
562-708-6295



Seven Long Beach Entrepreneurs Share \$20,000 Start-Up Award

DLBA business pitch competition helps local businesses reach next level

(LONG BEACH, CA – June 13, 2022) A “Shark Tank”-style business pitch competition organized by the Downtown Long Beach Alliance (DLBA) has netted big catches for seven local entrepreneurs selected to receive portions of a grant totaling \$20,000 to fuel their small businesses.

In its fifth year, the Pitchfest Incubator Awards were presented to business owners who pitched their own unique plans to a judging panel of Long Beach’s economic and community leaders. To qualify for Pitchfest, those business owners first completed the DLBA’s five-week Entrepreneur & Small Business Education Series, a program coordinated in partnership with Long Beach State University’s Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and Farmers & Merchants Bank.

“DLBA continues to create opportunities for local entrepreneurs to grow their innovative ideas into successful businesses that we believe will enhance our Downtown economy, especially as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Austin Metoyer, Economic Development & Policy Manager, DLBA. “This free comprehensive education series and annual Pitchfest is one of several DLBA programs designed to invest in a diverse group of growing businesses in Downtown including providing more opportunities for women and entrepreneurs of color.”

The Pitchfest Incubator Award 2022 winners – who also receive one-on-one legal and business strategy support from Stone Law & Consulting, among other prizes – include:

- Andrew Boven & Shadia Auguste (\$3,000) to support the development of **Cheri’s Caribbean Kitchen**, a planned restaurant to bring Caribbean taste and culture to Downtown;
- Mary Warner (\$2,000) for the start-up **Kelpie** to create a swimsuit bottom that would be comfortable for trans children to wear;
- Daniel Sherman (\$2000), a financial advisor and coach, for **MindWallet**, his investment advisory business that provides “peace of mind for your wallet” and specializes in high yield bonds;
- Komal Gada, a Ph.D. candidate (\$6,500) to improve the efficiency and longevity of a wind turbine blade through a company called **PAVANAS**, which has created a vortex generator add-on tape that is patent pending;
- Marta Wrobel & Christian Gruenert (\$2,500) for **plus3mm**, a creative design studio that is launching operations in the United States and Germany;
- Vanessa Hernandez (\$2,000) for her **Mobile Wine Bar SoCal** business concept; a pop-up mobile wine bar experience for any private event; and
- Tonya Spurling (\$2,000), an entrepreneur who developed **SistaGals Baked Goods**—her concept involves selling authentic Southern desserts “made from scratch with love and butter.”

Komal Gada, who won the largest prize, will use the funding to continue his nature-inspired aerodynamically efficient work on wind turbine technology. Pursuing his doctorate in a joint program at CSULB and Claremont Graduate University, he believes solutions to fight global warming can be found in nature and said PAVANAS will one day help reduce CO2 emissions.

“I have been studying the aerodynamic characteristics of birds, drag reducing properties of shark skin, and the streamline body of dolphins for nearly a decade,” said Gada. “Putting together years of research and innovative thinking, I, along with my mentor, Dr. Hamid Rahai at CSU Long Beach, have developed a novel design which can be used on any slender body to improve its aerodynamic characteristics.”

Wishing the best for Gada and all of the ingenious Pitchfest awardees is legacy sponsor Farmers & Merchant Bank, which has committed \$90,000 for award grants over three years (until 2023).

“I was honored to, once again, serve as a judge for DLBA’s Entrepreneur & Small Business Education Series Pitchfest competition. These new business ideas for the Downtown community are exciting,” said Kourosh Davatolhagh, Vice President and Relationship Manager at Farmers & Merchants Bank. “Congratulations to the Incubator Award winners and a job well done to all of the entrepreneurs who participated.”

#

About DLBA: DLBA is a non-profit, community-based organization whose mission is to cultivate, preserve and promote a healthy, safe, and prosperous Downtown for all. By balancing the interests of the residents, as well as businesses, the DLBA creates tangible progress by way of vested interest and solidified partnerships across local, municipal, and commercial lines. For additional information, visit www.downtownlongbeach.org, or follow on Facebook @downtownlongbeach, and on Twitter and Instagram @DLBA.