



Posted on Sun, Nov. 13, 2011

## Contests open doors for S. Florida start-ups

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It's contest season for entrepreneurs, offering participants valuable feedback, perhaps some fame, maybe even financial gain.

One of the highlights of Global Entrepreneurship Week, which kicks off Monday, will be the finals of the Launch Pad's Elevator Pitch Contest from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday at Storer Auditorium on UM's campus. The 20 finalists in the community and student tracks will compete with their 90-second pitches for more than \$100,000 in prizes. There is also a People's Choice competition, where the public can select their favorites through social media voting:

<http://www.thelaunchpad.org/peopleschoice2011>

Pitch contests are not just about the winning, the organizers told me. You never know who might be in the audience — your next big customer, a potential corporate partner, your first investor.

Universities are holding business plan competitions too.

Registration begins Monday for FAU's 2012 Business Plan Competition, hosted by Florida Atlantic University's Adams Center for Entrepreneurship and the College of Business. The competition is open to the community and lasts several months; those who advance to the finals present their plans to a panel of entrepreneurs, executives and venture capitalists.

FAU's competition is intensive, but the payoff is huge: FAU students, alumni and members of the business community compete for a share of more than \$200,000 in cash and prizes, the organizers say.

One of last year's contestants told me that even though she didn't win, she received feedback from the judges that helped shape significant, positive changes to her business plan. That's more valuable than cash.

High school students, take note: For the first time, FAU's competition will also include a track for juniors and seniors from local high schools. The prize: a four-year scholarship to FAU. For more information and to register for the competition, visit [www.business.fau.edu/bpc](http://www.business.fau.edu/bpc).

St. Thomas University is holding its Student Entrepreneur Competition on Thursday from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Carnival Cruise Line Lobby & Room 101. Open to all STU students, there are two categories this year: the New Entrepreneur, for entrants in the idea phase, and the Developing Entrepreneur, which is for entrants in the start-up phase. Students can compete in teams and are required to have a business plan; a physical display and a Powerpoint presentation. There will be cash prizes and consulting services for the winners.

All week as part of Global Entrepreneurship Week, The nonprofit Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) is presenting the World Series of Innovation, in which 18 high school

student teams from around the country present their business plans in an online competition for a classroom grant and other prizes.

Two of the teams are from Miami Edison High School. They are Marc Louis, Phaby Lubin, Tiffany Nelson, Tamara Petit and Patricia Predelus of 300 Calories or Less, who are finalists in the New Franchise Idea category, and Quanesha Estime, Stephanie Frederic, Nerida Godinez, Frederic Knight and Melinda Lubin of E-Pride, finalists in the College and Career Readiness Product or Service category. Their teacher is Yolette Mezadiou.

Cast your vote to support these South Florida teen entrepreneurs and their class at [www.nfte.com](http://www.nfte.com).

Two NFTE South Florida teams also competed last month in NFTE's national business plan competition in New York. Miamian Jonathan Ovidia of Love Puppy Love, a fashion company, won the online competition. His prize: \$2,000 to help his business grow and a pair of roundtrip plane tickets.

Watch for the 14th Annual Miami Herald Business Plan Challenge, sponsored by Florida International University's Pino Global Entrepreneurship Center, to launch in early February. You can enter your three-page plan in one of three tracks — community, FIU and high school — and we have a few surprises in store. Stay tuned.

Need help with that business plan? Want to learn more about launching a company, the latest trends in marketing strategy or finding out what investors look for in an entrepreneur? There's an "Idea to Startup" panel at St. Thomas University Monday, for instance, Building Your Brand at UM on Tuesday and an Introduction to Entrepreneurship seminar at FAU on Friday and that's just a start. Check out our listing of dozens of free and open Global Entrepreneurship Week events that begin Monday around South Florida at [www.MiamiHerald.com/businessmonday](http://www.MiamiHerald.com/businessmonday)

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