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Wednesday, December 4, 2013

Frankfort attorney-mother-inventor wins a \$100,000 Vogt Award for Babylocity venture

Special to KyForward

Take a universal problem and develop a simple, convenient solution.

And don't take it to Walmart ... go for the specialty baby stores such as Babies"R"Us.

That's the strategy that made Danville native LaShana Harris the 2013 recipient of the Vogt Invention and Innovation \$100,000 Demo Day Award, beating out three other companies.

The awards were presented in November at the end of the Vogt Awards Demo Day Showcase at Nucleus.



LaShana Harris, the inventor of Mix&Go, the first product of Frankfort-based Babylocity, won the \$100,000 Vogt Award for her startup. (Photo from Facebook)

Harris' Frankfort-based startup Babylocity's (good name!) first product, Mix & Go, is a multi-compartment baby-feeding bottle. To learn more, [click here](#).

Mix & Go bottles store and mix water and baby formula powder on demand. Its inventor is a mother, lawyer and now an entrepreneur with a six-figure check for her startup for her first product.

Not bad.

In her pitch, Harris noted that conditions aren't always sanitary for mixing baby formula on the run. You need formula, clean water and a bottle ... not always convenient. With Mix & Go, the water is on the bottom, formula in middle and the top is nipple. A sliding mechanism releases the formula into the water.

(Full disclosure: Harris pitched first at the demo day, and had the crowd from the beginning.)

"We feel strongly that Babylocity is an idea and a company that not only lives up to Henry Heuser's original charitable vision, but provides an invention that is relevant to today's lifestyles," said Susan Barry, president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Louisville, in a news release.

Demo day was hosted by the Community Foundation of Louisville and Greater Louisville Inc.'s EnterpriseCorp.

The three other competing companies were Liberate Medical, a Louisville-based medical device company, ModBox Storage LLC, makers of modular shipping and storage boxes for contractor job sites, and Wixel Technologies, creators of a digital product to help the visually impaired.

Vogt Demo Day provided the four early-stage manufacturing companies – recipients of the 2013 Vogt Award Development Grants announced earlier this year – the opportunity to demonstrate their products to the business community.

As part of this year's Vogt program, each startup took part in the LaunchIt-powered By Nucleus 10-week Lean Start-Up training course, which focused on helping the companies refine their products through customer feedback.

Each participated in weekly Vogt-specific, product-focused classes that covered topics such as prototyping, what manufacturing resources are available in Kentucky, product distribution, marketing, packaging, branding, supply chain management and lean manufacturing.

The Vogt Awards has an established list of experienced manufacturing-specific mentors the companies can rely upon for mentoring and coaching, according to a news release.

The Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development and the University of Louisville Office of the Executive Vice President for Research and Innovation both contributed financially to the Vogt participants to help leverage the dollars spent at the University of Louisville Rapid Prototyping Center/Micro/Nano Technology Center, according to the release.

This really was an “everyone is a winner” effort. Tendai Charasika, EnterpriseCorp executive director, noted all four startups are ready to commercialize their products working with some of the community's best mentors and getting solid LEAN startup training.

The Vogt Invention and Innovation Fund is a component fund of the Community Foundation and is the source of funding for the awards. GLI's EnterpriseCorp administers the program.

About each company:

- **Babylocity** is a company designed to develop high quality, innovative products for babies on-the-go. Its first product is the Mix&Go, an all-in-one baby feeding bottle, a practical solution for mothers who are formula feeding their babies when they are away from home. The Mix&Go utilizes separate compartments for water and formula in one comprehensive unit.

- **Liberate Medical:** Designed to improve quality of life and reduce medical costs for patients with respiratory complications, Liberate Medical is developing two devices based on electrical stimulation. VentFree is a physician's tool, which is designed for the hospital setting. SecondBreath is a wearable, assistive device designed to enhance breathing in patients with COPD.

- **ModBox** is a manufacturer of modular style job site storage boxes for a wide array of targets including large and small contractors, ship builders and the military. The ModBox technology reduces shipping costs and storage volume.

- **Wixel Technologies** is creating unique ways for visually impaired people to interface with digital information through a tactile device that allows them to feel information such as maps, videos and images. Wixel's design and technology also has applications for video games, medical needs, and military and aerospace uses.

The Vogt Awards provide funding and support for early stage manufacturing companies. As part of the annual Vogt awards program, which was revamped this year to include an accelerator program for winners, companies were awarded development grants of \$20,000 apiece. The program is funded by a \$5 million endowment created by the late Henry Heuser Sr., president of Louisville's Henry Vogt Machine Co.

The Community Foundation of Louisville was founded in 1984, and is the largest community foundation in Kentucky with \$380 million in assets and more than 1,300 charitable funds. Each fund has its own name and charitable purpose as defined by its donors. In 2012, these funds awarded more than 7,000 grants totaling \$34.5 million to nonprofit organizations in the Louisville area and beyond. For more information, visit [here](#).



Greater Louisville Inc. is a regional metro chamber of commerce dedicated to connecting and growing businesses, leading economic development, driving job creation and entrepreneurial activity. GLI is committed to transforming the community by improving the region's quality of life, advocating for a pro-business environment and developing a talented workforce.

EnterpriseCorp is GLI's entrepreneurial arm. Robust startup activity and an abundance of fast-growth, entrepreneurial companies are a sign of a flourishing regional economy. EnterpriseCorp is dedicated to nurturing and strengthening this important segment by encouraging risk-taking, cultivating new sources of capital and creating an infrastructure ready to assist these ventures.

This story was reported by Cheryl Boyd for Insider Louisville, where it first appeared. Additional information was taken from a Vogt Awards news release.

Comments

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