Happy Valley LaunchBox announces first LaunchTeams

Invent Penn State initiative welcomes six business startups
January 14, 2016

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — Today (Jan. 14) Happy Valley LaunchBox announced its inaugural cohort, an entrepreneurial class of six business startups who will participate in Invent Penn State’s no-cost business pre-accelerator program. The teams will complete 10 weeks of business startup training, have access to no-cost legal and marketing consulting, and enjoy no-cost co-working space that’s available 24 hours daily.

The final six entrepreneurial teams had submitted applications in early December, along with more than 40 other companies or entrepreneurial teams, and were selected from 11 finalists in a highly competitive process. Each finalist interviewed and pitched its business idea to the LaunchBox selection committee made up of a mix of entrepreneurs and business startup service providers. The process yielded a diverse mix of Penn State students, faculty and Happy Valley community entrepreneurs comprising the finalist cohort of teams.

“We believed, based on research, that there was a need for LaunchBox — a dynamic and collaborative University-community entrepreneurial environment,” Penn State Vice President for Research Neil Sharkey said. “But we were pleasantly surprised by the high number of applications and the diverse mix of entrepreneurs and startups that applied for our first cohort. There are a lot of great ideas to be commercialized. We made tough choices.”

The inaugural six LaunchTeams include the following:

**Lockeroom**, a platform for managing youth sports teams and leagues that automates and expedites registration, scheduling, and communication processes for team and league management.
*Team*: Brook Hart, Kurt Collins and Joe Gazza

**Project Vive**, a speech assistance technology that aims to give a voice to individuals who cannot talk by providing a low-cost, effective device.
*Team*: Mary Elizabeth McCulloch and Rodney Miller

**ReDi Index**, guidance and methods to measure an organization’s recycling efforts with a two-number system to measure your improvement and progress toward zero waste.
*Team*: Brendan Bagley, Al Matyasovsky and Shulin Chen

**Scenomics**, a software-as-service concept that helps health care
organizations identify and quantify the value of their technology investments.

**Team:** Steve Haynes and Bryan Adams

**Sommus**, a medical device that can diagnose sleep apnea at home, instead of requiring patients to check into a sleep clinic.

**Team:** Nick LaBarbera and Michael McPhail

**Squid Bioadhesives**, a protein-based bioadhesive that is 10 times stronger than other natural adhesives and is capable of bonding underwater, as well as self-repairing. The material was inspired by the suction cups of squids and has potential as a surgical adhesive.

**Team:** Abdon Pena-Francesch and Huihun Jung

Startup founders in the cohort cited a number of reasons for applying to Happy Valley LaunchBox: benefiting from workshops and training, access to expertise concerning company formation and intellectual property, and having a place for their teams to work downtown.

“Something I don’t think any of us realized growing up here, was how many talented and successful entrepreneurs there are in this community,” said Brook Hart, co-founder of Lockeroom. We are looking forward to being able to learn from many of the talented people who have achieved the type of success that we are working toward.”

“The opportunity that Invent Penn State provides through LaunchBox is a great one,” said Brendan Bagley, co-founder of Redi Index. “We have had what we think is a viable product for nearly two years with very few customers. We hope that the expertise provided through the LaunchBox program will assist us in improving our product, our marketing, or whatever we need to bring us to the next level.”

“We are honored to be selected for the LaunchBox program! We are looking forward to taking our ideas out of the lab and making a difference,” said Abdon Pena-Francesch, co-founder of Squid Bioadhesives.

“Our team is thrilled to be selected for the Happy Valley LaunchBox! The workshop and training opportunities provided by the LaunchBox will be instrumental in getting our concept off the ground. We are especially excited to learn from experienced entrepreneurs and business people from the State College area,” Nicholas Labarbera, co-founder of Sommus, said.

“We’re very excited to be working with this talented group of mentors, in a new and exciting space, and with a fascinating group of like-minded startup entrepreneurs,” said Steven Haynes, founder of Scenomics.

“Securing space downtown is a huge step for Project Vive to be integrated into the State College community,” said Mary Elizabeth McCullloch, co-founder of Project Vive. “It is a perfect opportunity to have an office space and awesome mentorship all in the same place.”

During the 10-week LaunchBox program, LaunchTeams will commit three hours per week to in-class time and five hours per week to out-of-class time. After the training, the teams will be eligible to retain their seats for an additional nine months to continue to develop their business concepts. Additionally, staff will connect teams who need capital with potential investors.

Following the inaugural cohort, LaunchBox will expand to accept 10 LaunchTeams for each session, including summer and fall of this year. Ongoing, LaunchBox will select three cohorts per year, for an ultimate capacity of 30 business startups.

“If you have an idea, you should connect with us at invent.psu.edu,” Sharkey said. “Due to the collaboration
facilitated by the Invent Penn State initiative, every team that applied to LaunchBox is now a part of our entrepreneurship family and has been referred to proper mentors and programs in our ecosystem to grow their ideas. We expect they’ll apply for the Summer Founders Program, the LaunchBox summer session or TechCelerator when they’re ready. Happy Valley is a great place to start a business in 2016.”

**Happy Valley Launchbox**
LaunchBox is a signature program in the Invent Penn State initiative, which also provided seed-grant funding for six other entrepreneurship center programs in Penn State Commonwealth campus communities, including Abington, Behrend, New Kensington, Harrisburg, Lehigh Valley and Wilkes-Barre. Lehigh Valley LaunchBox opened in December 2015. All the centers will focus on creating startups companies, many of which will have an opportunity to pitch angel investors and venture capitalists for funding at the Invent Penn State Venture and Intellectual Property Conference on Oct. 6 and 7 at the Penn Stater Conference Center Hotel.

Happy Valley LaunchBox, located at 224 S. Allen St., expects to open its doors in early spring for walk-in information desk service for area entrepreneurs during weekday business hours. Entrepreneurs interested in starting a business can find the resources they need, both inside Penn State and in the local community.

Happy Valley LaunchBox was created in collaboration with the New Leaf Initiative, CREN, Ben Franklin Technology Partners, Innoblu, Innovation Park at Penn State, the Penn State Small Business Development Center, the Penn State Law Clinic, and the Penn State Offices of Industrial Partnerships and Technology Management, all which will provide no-cost services to Happy Valley entrepreneurs. For more information visit launchbox.psu.edu.

**Invent Penn State**
Invent Penn State is a Commonwealth-wide initiative to spur economic development, job creation and student career success. The initiative facilitates the challenging process of turning research discoveries into valuable products and services that can benefit Pennsylvanians and humankind. Invent Penn State blends entrepreneurship-focused academic programs, business startup training and incubation, funding for commercialization, and university-community collaborations. In 2015, Penn State was issued 55 U.S. patents, executed 30 licenses and options, formed 10 startup companies, and received 117 invention disclosures. If you’d like to connect with the initiative, visit invent.psu.edu.

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