Ideas growing for businesses that make a difference

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Ventures with strong connections to Tulane University and the A. B. Freeman School of Business were big winners in last week's 2012 New Orleans Entrepreneur Week, an event highlighting the city's thriving startup community. Companies founded by Tulane staff, students or alumni won three of the five major contests, each winning a $50,000 cash prize, while many more participated as contestants throughout the week.



NanoFex CEO David Culpepper, left, is congratulated by Tim Williamson (BSM '87), CEO of the Idea Village, after being selected as winner of the $50,000 Tulane Challenge during the 2012 New Orleans Entrepreneur Week.

"Tulane graduates and students continue to be at the forefront of the entrepreneurial movement in New Orleans," said Lina Alfieri-Stern, director of the Freeman School's Levy-Rosenblum Institute for Entrepreneurship. "Our graduates are discovering that entrepreneurship can be the answer to finding employment in New Orleans, generating wealth for our city and solving our community's most pressing problems."

Tierra Resources, a company that aims to create a market for carbon credits for wetland restoration, won the week's Water Challenge. Company founder and CEO Sarah Mack earned a PhD from the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine in 2009.

SOLarchitect Studio won The Big Idea Challenge. Co-founded by architecture alumnus Alex Landau, the firm provides a free, web-based tool to assess the feasibility of installing solar panels on homes.

For a special Tulane Challenge dedicated to innovations of Tulane staff, students and graduates, seven ventures competed for prize money donated by an anonymous alumnus. NanoFex, started by Vijay John, professor of chemical and bimolecular engineering, and David Culpepper won for an innovative solution to remediate contaminants in groundwater using biodegradable materials like sugar cane and crawfish shells.

"The seven teams who participated represent a fraction of the many alumni and students involved in social innovation and entrepreneurship in the region," Alfieri-Stern said.

Entrepreneur Week is an initiative of The Idea Village, a nonprofit that supports and sustains entrepreneurs and startups in New Orleans.