PMBA student earns top prize at PitchNOLA

November 21, 2013

As a first-year Tulane University student in 2006, Teddy Nathan saw firsthand the power of public service. Now, as a young entrepreneur, he's hoping to tap into that spirit of service to address some of the city's biggest needs.



Celebrating at PitchNOLA are Crescent City Connections team members, from left, Annie Daskovsky and co-founder Teddy Nathan, with Propeller representative Rebecca Conwell and Zach Cheney, also a co-founder of the venture. (Photo by Ian Cockburn)

Nathan (LA '10, MBA '16), senior program coordinator at the Tulane Center for Public Service and a Professional MBA student at the A. B. Freeman School of Business, was the big winner at the fifth annual PitchNOLA competition. The elevator pitch contest for local social entrepreneurship ventures took place Tuesday night (Nov. 19) in front

of a packed audience in the Woldenberg Art Center's Freeman Auditorium on the Tulane uptown campus.

Nathan and colleagues Zach Cheney and Melissa Garber earned the $5,000 grand prize with their pitch for Crescent City Connections, which works with local nonprofits to create customized volunteer experiences for tourist groups. The organization then channels fees collected from the volunteers back to the sponsoring nonprofit.

In awarding this year's top prize, judges praised Crescent City Connections for its efforts to turn the growing demand for volunteer opportunities into sustainable income for nonprofits.

"I think there was a sense that if somebody could come along and connect volunteers with opportunities, that would serve both the people who benefit from the volunteers and the volunteers themselves, who could get to experience a different part of New Orleans," said John Frazee, senior vice president with CBS News and one of this year's judges. "They seemed to have the potential for having impact on a lot of people."

For Nathan, winning this year's PitchNOLA was a special thrill.

"I come every year," he said. "I've been in the audience for the last four years, so it's crazy to be here on stage right now."

Nathan said he plans to use the prize money to host a pilot event for members of the business, hospitality and nonprofit communities to help those partners better understand what the organization hopes to provide for tourist groups.

"It's so they can actually have the volunteer experience we've been talking about, so that it's no longer just a concept," Nathan explains. "They can then be our goodwill ambassadors."

In addition to Crescent City Connections, PitchNOLA also awarded a $500 "audience favorite" prize to I Heart Louisiana, which helps connect Mardi Gras krewes to locally sourced and sustainable throws.

PitchNOLA was a joint presentation of Social Innovation & Social Entrepreneurship Initiatives at Tulane, the A. B. Freeman School of Business and Propeller, a nonprofit that supports social innovation in New Orleans.