Anatomy of a startup

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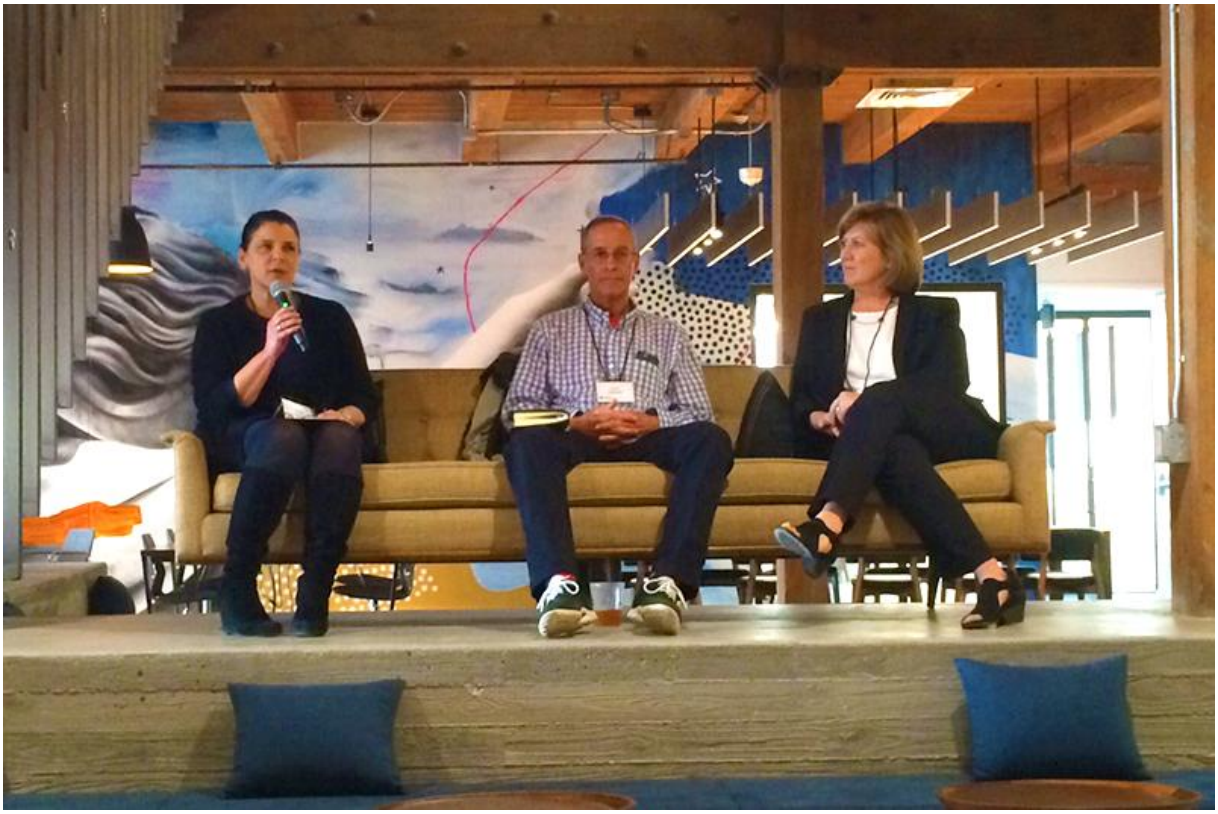

Fran Heller, John Elstrott and Kate Lavelle, left to right, discussed the evolution of Heller's startup Good2Go at a lunchtime talk hosted by the Freeman School's Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation.

It started with a problem.

While out on a run with her running group in San Francisco, Tulane University alumna Fran Heller wondered why there wasn't an easy way to find the nearest public restroom.

"I can type my address into Google and see how many leaves are in my front yard, but if you type the word 'restroom' into Google maps, it's a complete dead end,"

said Heller (NC ’88). “There’s no resource for that.”

That modest realization inspired Heller, previously a biotech and pharmaceuticals executive, to found Good2Go, a startup that uses a mobile app to give consumers access to customer restrooms in a variety of retail locations.

Heller discussed the evolution of Good2Go in November as part of a new entrepreneurial speaker series hosted by the Freeman School’s Albert Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. Joining Heller for the talk were two Good2Go board members with close ties to Tulane: Kate Lavelle (BSM ’87), former executive vice president and CFO of Dunkin’ Brands, and John Elstrott, former chairman of the board of Whole Foods Market and emeritus professor of entrepreneurship at the Freeman School.

While it may sound trivial, access to restrooms is a problem for customers in need as well as the stores that operate them. Heller discovered that retailers like Target and Starbucks devote significant resources to keeping their restrooms available and in good condition for customers.

“Being able to secure access to the restroom for a retailer is a big deal,” said Lavelle, a friend of Heller’s since their days at Tulane. “I knew this from dealing with operations at Dunkin’, particularly in the big cities, so when Fran had this idea, I knew it would not only be a win on the consumer side, but would be a win on the business side.”

Good2Go offers a subscription-based service that offers customers entry to the restrooms of various retailers through a smartphone app that provides them with a map of locations and an electronic key. The service is initially aimed at visitors to large cities like San Francisco, New York and London as well as the growing on-demand workforce – drivers for services like FedEx, UPS, Lyft and Uber whose routes vary on a daily basis.

In exchange for their participation, the retailers get a share of subscription fees as well as increased foot traffic in stores. Good2Go also installs its proprietary technology and works with the retailers to update their restrooms if necessary with hands-free fixtures and baby-changing stations to create a safe, reliable, high-tech experience for customers.

To date, the company has raised a little over $7 million from investors to support the development of the app and its initial rollout. Among those initial investors were Lavelle and Elstrott, who discussed why he chose to back the venture.

“I probably listen to 50 pitches a year, and this was easily in the top five,” said Elstrott. “Both Fran and Kate were willing to invest substantial amounts of their own money in getting this venture started. When the founders are willing to put up hard-earned cash behind their own venture, that gets my attention.

“And they were Tulane alums,” he added with a smile. “I spent 30 years of my life at Tulane. I like to work with Tulane people.”

Good2Go is currently available only in San Francisco, but Heller says she hopes to introduce the service to additional markets in the near future, including New Orleans. Heller said the company is currently working with PJ’s Coffee to bring Good2Go to New Orleans.

“It was a pleasure to host Fran, Kate and John and let them share the story of Good2Go,” said Rob Lalka, executive director of the Lepage Center. “Tulane alumni are behind so many great entrepreneurial ventures. In the coming months, we hope to present more events like this to showcase startups and bring together the entrepreneurial community.”