Lepage Center announces 2025 Pitch Friday finalists

April 14, 2025

The Grand Prize Round of Pitch Friday, the Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation's annual student elevator pitch competition series, will take place on Friday, April 18, in the Goldring/Woldenberg Business Complex's Marshall Family Commons.

Now in its 7th year, the series gives budding entrepreneurs the chance to pitch their startup businesses to a panel of judges for cash prizes. The Lepage Center hosts five Pitch Friday competitions between October and March. The Grand Prize Round brings the winners of those five rounds back to compete for a share of $30,000 in cash and prizes.

Below are this year's finalists.

Abode

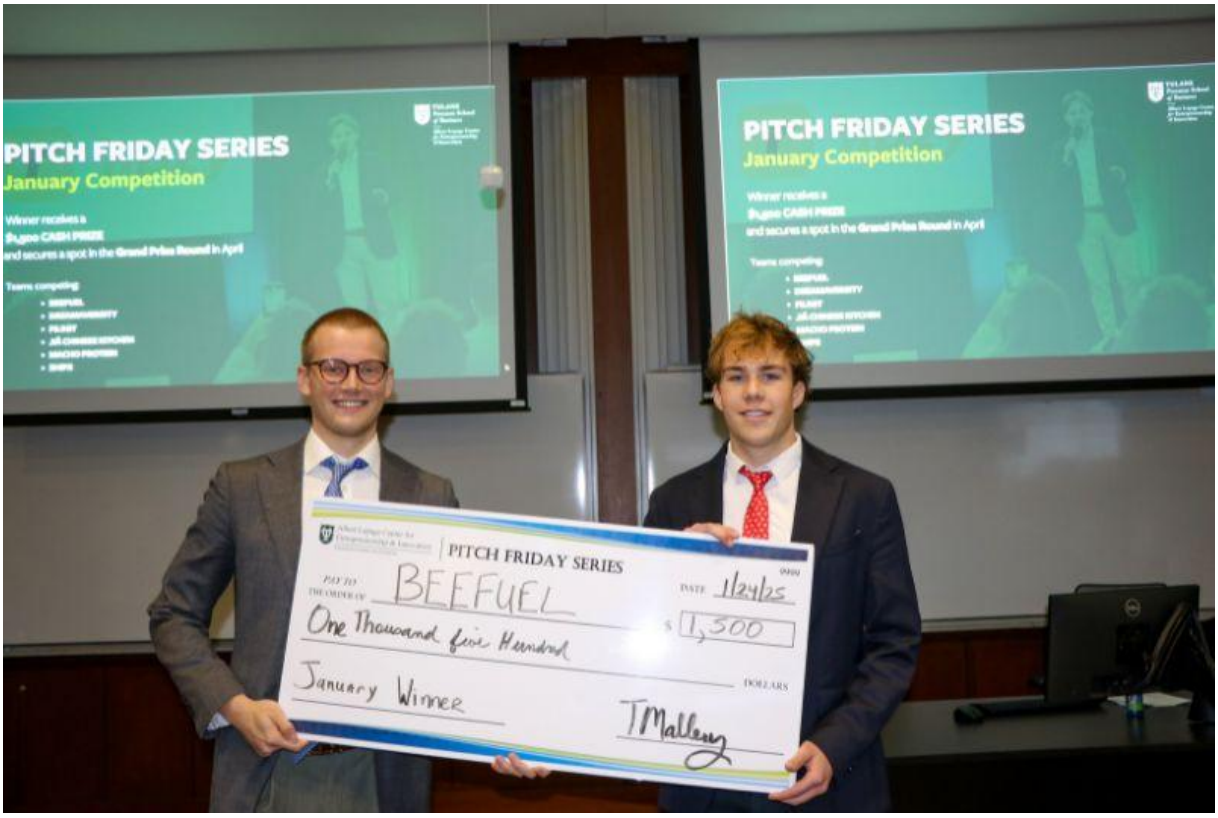
Alec Rovner (BSM ’24, BSC ’24, MSR ’25) receives a prize check from Pitch Friday judges. Rovner's startup Abode, a platform designed to streamline student housing, took home the top prize during the second round of the competition on Nov. 8, 2024. From left Scott Crockett, Alec Rovner, Margaret Molloy, Peter Rosenbaum and Anna deTiege Harris.

Alec Rovner (BSM ’24, BSC ’24, MSR ’25), Rosalie Sarnataro (BSM ’24) and Amara Midouhas (BS ’24) are the entrepreneurs behind Abode, an innovative platform designed to streamline student housing by connecting university students with landlords.

Rovner’s challenging experience with off-campus housing during his undergraduate years sparked the idea for a startup that would simplify the housing search and address the special needs of student renters. The Abode platform offers rent payment options for individual roommates, provides seamless group communication between landlords and tenants, and provides landlords with a digital maintenance system for prioritizing tenant requests.

If they take the top prize, the Abode team will partner with a top-tier app development firm to finalize their app and officially launch the platform in the Tulane market. They plan to use the prize money to advance school partnerships and expand their market presence to at least three universities, in the hope of becoming an indispensable resource in the student housing market.

BEEFUEL



Co-founders Owen Smith (left) and Chris Krahn (BSM ’25) won the third round of the competition on Jan. 24, 2025 for BEEFUEL, a startup that creates nutrient-rich food products to improve athletic performance.

Chris Krahn (BSM ’25) heads BEEFUEL, a startup that promises to be the next generation of performance nutrition by creating clean, science-backed formulas that boost health and improve sports performance.

Krahn’s own experiences as an athlete led him to start the company. “As an athlete turned entrepreneur, I was tired of performance products that promised results but cut corners,” Krahn says. “I started BEEFUEL to build what I wish existed: products rooted in real science, with ingredients I’d actually take every day. Beyond the formulas, I hope to improve men’s health and help people unlock their full physical and mental potential.”

Krahn says that the $15,000 in prize money would cover 81% of his venture’s production costs, including the manufacture of 500 full-size tubs and 7,500 sample packs of its newest product, HYBRYD, a daily supplement that combines creatine, functional mushrooms, and adaptogens for energy, cognition, and recovery. Krahn hopes that within a year, his startup will have hundreds of active subscribers, retention data to prove the product works, and a clear path to profitability.

Cloud IX

Isabella Kulstand (BS ’25) presents during the final round of the 2024 Pitch Friday Competition. Kulstand's venture, Cloud IX, empowers survivors of sexual violence to report assaults.

Founded by Isabella Kulstad (BS ’25) with the help of Dana Fos, Dominique Salinas and Brian Wong, Cloud IX is a platform empowering survivors of campus sexual violence to report assaults. Featuring a university-specific, trauma-informed LLM, Cloud IX connects students, survivors and peers to resources available on and off campus.

The platform was inspired by Kulstad’s experiences working with students affected by sexual violence. “I've worked with over 80 first-year students and saw firsthand the aftereffects of sexual violence,” Kulstad said. “The shame, the fear, the loneliness these students experience takes residence alongside a loss at what to do, who to talk to, and how to report. I created Cloud IX to reshape campus culture, empower survivors to report and make campuses safer.”

Cloud IX is the first and most intelligent sexual violence response platform, with a trauma-informed, student-centered approach to the healing process. “The platform connects students to real resources on their campus, helping them through every

step of the healing process,” Kulstad says.

The Cloud IX team plans to use the Pitch Friday prize money to initiate strategic partnerships and onboard employees. In addition, the team hopes to bring Cloud X in-network with more than 50 educational institutions by the end of 2026.

Cypher Challenges

Vasili Econopouly (MBA ’25, PHTM ’25) and Keagan Goldwait (BSM ’24, MBA ’25, PHTM ’25) display puzzle boxes from their startup, Cypher Challenges. The startup creates children's puzzles and games as an alternative to digital devices.

Vasili Econopouly (MBA ’25, PHTM ’25) and Keagan Goldwait (BSM ’24, MBA ’25, PHTM ’25) founded the startup Cypher Challenges in response to rising concerns about excessive screen use among children. Their company creates hands-on puzzle boxes designed to encourage children to think critically and play meaningfully without the need for digital devices.

What sets Cypher Challenges apart from the competition is its unique combination of immersive storytelling, tactile puzzle-solving and a physical reward, all delivered in one cohesive experience. Cypher Challenges’ puzzle boxes offer the excitement of

an escape room while also promoting developmental skills like reasoning, problem-solving and reading comprehension.

If awarded the grand prize, the team plans to use the funding to increase the size of their puzzle box inventory, improve the quality and variety of their monthly themes and scale their marketing efforts to reach more families who are seeking screen-free, educational entertainment. They aim to build a strong subscriber base and partner with educators and child development experts to continue enhancing the product.

Exactics

Exactics COO Dylan Murray (BS ’26, BSC ’24) celebrates winning the first round of the competition on October 11, 2024. Exactics' product, QuickLyme®, is the first fully at-home, lab-free rapid test for Lyme disease.

Led by Dylan Murray (BS ’26, BSC ’24), Julian Kage, Zachary Sarmoen, Maxwell Almeida and Sean Greeby, Exactics is a biotech startup tackling the gap in rapid, in-home infectious disease testing. Exactics developed Proteus+™, a revolutionary rapid test platform that can be adapted to hundreds of diseases by swapping biomarkers, dramatically lowering research and manufacturing costs.

The company’s first product, QuickLyme®, is the first fully at-home, lab-free rapid test for Lyme disease. Kage was inspired to develop the product after he watched a friend suffer with Lyme disease for months because of the lack of early detection tools. QuickLyme is the first patented, lab-free rapid test that detects Lyme disease by taking the tick, not blood, as the sample. The Exactics team says that unlike traditional tests that require lab processing and a 3-week delay before Lyme is detectable in the bloodstream, QuickLyme provides immediate answers at the point of exposure.

Already the recipient of a $30,000 prize as this year’s Tulane Business Model Competition runner up, the Exactics team plans to use the Pitch Friday prize money to secure lab space for an additional 6 months. They also plan to expand Proteus+™ beyond QuickLyme®, eventually developing tests for a host of tickborne diseases, including Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Alpha-gal syndrome.

The Grand Prize Round of the 2025 Pitch Friday Series will take place on Friday, April 18, at 2 p.m.in the Goldring/Woldenberg Business Complex’s Marshall Family Commons. The event is free and open to the public. For more information about this year’s Pitch Friday Grand Prize Round, contact Timekia Mallery, the Lepage Center’s manager of student programs, at tmallery@tulane.edu.