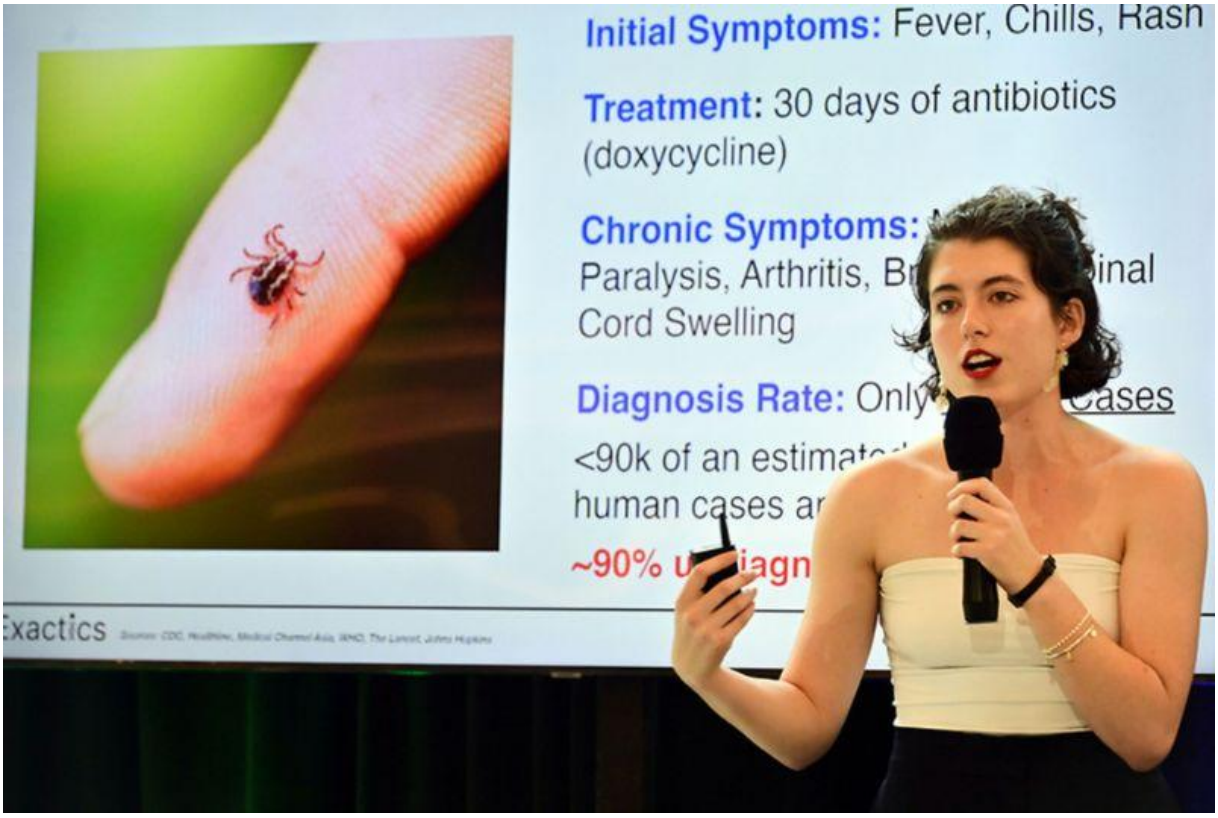
Biotech startup breaks through at Pitch Friday

April 25, 2025



Representing Exactics, Dylan Murray (SSE '27) impressed judges with QuickLyme, an infectious disease testing platform that can rapidly detect Lyme disease without the need for laboratory work. Exactics took home the top prize in the 2025 Pitch Friday competition.

Biotech startup Exactics took home the top prize of $15,000 in cash and $2,500 in pro bono legal services during the Grand Prize Round of this year's Pitch Friday Competition. The competition, hosted annually by the Lepage Center for

Entrepreneurship and Innovation, was held Friday, April 18, in the Goldring/Woldenberg Business Complex’s Marshall Family Commons.

Exactics impressed judges with Proteus+, its groundbreaking at-home infectious disease testing platform. Using the Proteus+ platform, the company’s debut product, QuickLyme, can rapidly detect Lyme disease without the need for laboratory work. Unlike traditional tests that rely on blood samples and take up to three weeks to detect infection, QuickLyme delivers immediate results by analyzing the tick instead of the infected blood.

Led by Dylan Murray (SSE ’27), Julian Kage, Zachary Sarmoen, Maxwell Almeida and Sean Greeby, the Exatics team says its product has applications beyond testing for Lyme disease. By swapping biomarkers, it can also be adapted to test for other tickborne diseases like Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Alpha-gal syndrome.

The Grand Prize Round was the culmination of this year's Pitch Friday Series, a monthly competition that allows young entrepreneurs to bring their startups to life. At each monthly competition, student entrepreneurs pitch their ventures to judges for a chance at $1,500 in cash and a spot in the grand prize round.

Murray said she was most excited to see how her team has grown in the months following their win during the first round of the Pitch Friday competition in October 2024.

“When I came into this competition in October, it was my first ever pitch competition,” she said. “And our company has grown so much since then. Thinking about that, it was almost like an out-of-body experience. It’s an incredible feeling.”

The prize money will allow Exactics to continue to afford the lab space it needs to develop its products.

“We can really use this money,” Murray said. “Those lab space bills are really high, and this will allow us to move at the pace that we want to.”

Laura Beauchamp, vice president of business operations at Entergy Louisiana, who served as one of three judges during the competition’s final round, said the judges were impressed by the wide-ranging applications of Exactics’ platform.

“The sheer potential for market share really put Exactics over the edge,” Beauchamp said. “They have the ability to make this into a business very quickly

and expand into other areas.”

Cloud IX, a platform founded by Isabella Kulstad (SSE ’25) to empower survivors of campus sexual violence to report assaults, took home second place in the final round and a cash prize of $7,500.

BEEFUEL, a startup led by Chris Krahn (BSM ’25) that promises to be the next generation of performance nutrition, won third place and a prize of $5,000.

Also competing in the Grand Prize round were Abode, a platform created by Alec Rovner (BSM ’24, A ’26) that streamlines the student housing experience by connecting students with landlords via a custom-built app, and Cypher Challenges, a company founded by Vasili Econopouly (MBA ’25, PHTM ’25) and Keagan Goldwait (BSM ’24, MBA ’25, PHTM ’25) that creates hands-on puzzle boxes designed to encourage children to think critically and play meaningfully without the need for digital devices.

Competition judge Nina Balan, director of strategic initiatives at The Beach, UNO’s Research and Technology Park, said picking a winner was not easy.

“They all had compelling stories and good data, so it was a difficult choice,” Balan said. “But the fact that the Exactics team is already working in labs and doing testing on a scale level was persuasive. They have a product that’s already deliverable in the market, and that made us want to continue to invest."

“I saw some of these teams present a couple of months ago, and I saw the growth,” Balan continued. “Their pitches have become more professional and more inclusive of all aspects of business development, from customer discovery to market strategy. It’s beautiful to see how these bright young minds are thinking about how they can solve the world’s problems.”