

What new businesses won Start Peninsula?



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The annual Start Peninsula contest is not only helping to launch new local businesses, but it also is helping draw attention to the region's entrepreneurial scene, an organizer said.

Of the 30 business concepts pitched, the top three took home prizes of \$5,000 each on Sunday after a weekend of mentoring, event organizer Tim Ryan said. The winning businesses were: a ride-sharing companion service called Senior Runs, a firm that develops skincare products for people of color called Nuekie and Safety Nailer, a tool that helps start a nail or screw.

The Start Peninsula weekend at the Applied Research Center in Newport News also attracted a visit from Jason Calacanis, a popular angel investor in San Francisco best known for his early investment in **Uber**. Seven businesses from the Hampton Roads and Richmond area pitched for him separately in front of an audience of about 240 people, Ryan said.

"This was a huge win for our community," he said. "Everyone in the audience walked away with more information about entrepreneurship and investing than they ever would have imagined."

Safety Nailer started selling on Amazon.com at the end of July and co-owner Kristen Eifes of York County said they will use the prize money to help the business expand.

Her husband and disabled Navy veteran Daniel Eifes came up with the idea and refined the design with business partner and friend Drew Zirkle. The idea is not only to make it easier to nail or screw, but to protect fingers in the process, making it safer for everyone — even kids, Kristen Eifes said.

She said she learned about Start Peninsula from the operator of a local UPS store who was interested in the product.

Eunice Cofie-Obeng pitched Nuekie — her middle name — at Start Peninsula to find other entrepreneurs and resources because she is new to the region after moving to Hampton last year.

"I learned a lot," she said.

Cofie-Obeng, who has a background as a cosmetic chemist, pitched an acne kit with cleanser, toner, moisturizer and treatment serum. She said she plans to start selling her skincare products designed for men

and women of color in January. Customers also get a skin lifestyle and nutrition plan and will be able to get online consults at Nuekie.com.

Jayne Sasso, who was a family caregiver for more than 15 years, quietly launched the Senior Runs platform in September last year as a way to help aging adults stay independent. Drivers set their own schedules and riders can find their own driver and set up appointments, she said.

The service goes beyond transportation as drivers act as companion aides and wait for riders after medical appointments or they can help riders shop for groceries at the store and bring them inside, she said.

This was the third time Sasso, who lives in Newport News, has refined and pitched a business at Start Peninsula.

“Start Peninsula is a good way for entrepreneurs to stay plugged into the ecosystem. As an entrepreneur, you need to stay engaged,” Sasso said, adding, “I never give up.”

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