

Start Peninsula returns with series of business micro-pitches ahead of final competition in November

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VIRGINIA GAZETTE | JUN 30, 2020 AT 4:26 PM



Entrepreneurs are practicing their best pitches for the ninth annual Start Peninsula event, which will start off with three micro-pitch competitions July 14, Sept. 22 and Oct. 13.

Start Peninsula 2020 is hosted by James City County, in partnership with the cities of Hampton, Newport News, Williamsburg and Poquoson, and York County. These localities all provide funding and staff for the event, and they also serve as hosts, according to Laura Messer, James City County Economic Development Office tourism and marketing coordinator.

“James City County has been home to entrepreneurship since 1607,” Christopher Johnson, director of economic development for James City County, said in the news release. “We are excited about the new format for Start Peninsula because it allows more early stage businesses to participate in micro-pitch events. We look forward to hearing the 12 qualified early stage business pitches in November.”

The first micro-pitch competition July 14 will be held virtually. Each event will have a maximum of 15 different businesses, and each participating business must pay a \$50 fee, according to the news release.

Each pitch at these competitions will be three minutes long, plus a three-minute Q&A period. Props and slides are also allowed, according to startpeninsula.com.

There will be four winners and one alternate winner selected at each event, and the winners will be invited to the “Shark Tank”-like main event Nov. 4 at the Williamsburg Regional Library, 515 Scotland St. This competition will have five-minute-long pitches, and each will be followed by five minutes of Q&A.

The top three winners of the 12 pitches in November will receive \$5,000 in funding, plus other resources to help them launch their businesses. The top three winners from each micro-pitch competition leading up to the main event in November will each receive \$500.

Since 2012, there have been nearly 250 business pitches at this annual event, in which business leaders and mentors help entrepreneurs develop their early stage business ideas, according to the news release.

“They have an awesome team of business leaders, experts and mentors, and it’s a very positive, entrepreneurial program in the Hampton Roads area,” said Tyler Chianelli, chief executive officer and founder of Vestalyze, an investment tracking and analytics software company that allows individual investors to optimize their portfolio.



John Coggins, left, with Atlas Quick-Clip, Neil Hailey with French Slide and Tyler Chianelli with Vestalyze were the three Start Peninsula winners Nov. 3 at Hampton University. - Original Credit: Tara Bozick/Staff - Original Source: Handout (HANDOUT)

Vestalyze was one of the three winners of Start Peninsula 2019, alongside Atlas Quick-Clip and French Slide LLC. Chianelli said being one of last year's winners was a "momentum boost."

"It was reinforcement of doing the right thing and how hard work pays off. You have a worthy mission, and you believe in it," he said.

Neil Hailey, chief executive officer and co-founder of French Slide LLC, said that he appreciated the opportunity to meet other like-minded entrepreneurs at Start Peninsula 2019. Hailey said it was a great opportunity to make connections and spread the word about your business.

"That exposure has been invaluable in terms of just making people aware of what we're doing," he said. "It's a way to have free publicity, to make those deeper connections and to see what's out there."

There's also the challenge of the pitch competitions themselves. Part of that challenge, according to Chianelli, is that you have a very finite amount of time to deliver your pitch at each stage of the competition. But this also helps the competitors hone their pitches, which is crucial for startups that need to convey their ideas "as quickly and clearly as possible," Chianelli said.

“That’s how people understand your business,” he said about pitching. “That’s how you attain investors, and that’s how you sell your idea to the public, from a customer and investor standpoint.”

Participants can register up until the day prior for each micro-pitch event , and there is still space left for the July 14 competition, according to Messer. Visit startpeninsula.com for more information.

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