

O'Brien, Hang 10 Poké win 2022 NEW Launch Alliance Pitch Event

AntiMussel, Starr Merrie Native Gifts also among New North entrepreneurial winners

NEW NORTH, December 2, 2022 – Hang 10 Poké, a business idea of food-service entrepreneur Kean O'Brien, was the winner of the NEW Launch Alliance Pitch Event, held Dec. 1 at TitledTownTech in Green Bay. AntiMussel and Starr Merrie Native Gifts took second and third place, respectively. The three winning entries emerged from a group of eight entrepreneurial pitches which had advanced from local pitch competitions held across Northeast Wisconsin last month.

Along with receiving prize money, the three winners will be invited to give an update to an even wider investor and business audience during the New North Summit, scheduled for June 8, 2023, at Lambeau Field.

"We have so many great new business ideas – across a wide number of industries – underway here in the New North region," says Barb LaMue, president and CEO of New North Inc. "We have held the pitch competition for several years, and I have to say each year the range of business ideas and quality of the presentations continues to get stronger."

The winning entrepreneurial pitch was Hang 10 Poké, presented by Kean O'Brien of Fond du Lac, Wis. He received the first-place prize money of \$2,000.

O'Brien's entrepreneurial idea was to offer a variety of fresh, vibrant poké bowls that cater to different tastes and provide a healthy alternative to fast-food and grab-and-go options. Working out of a food incubator kitchen, he first tested the market for his product at the local farmer's market in the summer of 2021. When he found initial success with his personalized poké creations, O'Brien moved to a small kitchen in November of that year once the farmer's market shut down in October.

Hang 10 Poké soon will be opening in a new, permanent location, at 74 S. Main St., Suite 104, in Fond du Lac. Tentatively the plan is to open at some point during the week of Dec. 5. Currently catering primarily to a lunch crowd, the restaurant will be expanding more into dinner hours with its new location.

"Winning the NEW Launch Alliance pitch competition and the prize money that comes with that really will let me nail the first impression in my new location," says O'Brien, who has spent seven years in the food-service industry, previously working at two Appleton-area sushi restaurants. "I can create the feel we're looking for. It will help my vision come true."

More information on Hang 10 Poké can be found at www.hang10poke.com.

Second place and \$1,000 in prize money went to AntiMussel, presented by Tyler Rezachek of Plymouth, Wis. The service-disabled Iraq war veteran's pre-seed, prototype-stage company is dedicated to removing invasive mussel species from public and private waterways and converting them into the world's only source of renewable calcium carbonate, which is used in products like paper, paint, pharmaceuticals and plastics.

According to Rezachek, \$1.5 billion tax dollars is spent annually to repair infrastructure from destruction caused by invasive mussels. A life-long fisherman, he "saw a problem and developed a solution," and says the best part of being a winner in the NEW Launch Alliance Pitch Event is the exposure that it provides to his company.

[AntiMussel](#) will be carrying out a pilot program in spring 2023, conducting a full-scale cleanup of a mussel infestation. The work will provide a real-life case study to help attract future engagement and investment.

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Third place was won by Starr Merrie Native Gifts, presented by Eliza Skenandore of the Oneida Nation. It is a minority-owned small business of she and her husband, Shawn, both of whom currently are studying entrepreneurship at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC).

[Starr Merrie Native Gifts](#) offers culture presentations for institutions seeking diversity programming for its students, staff and/or patrons. Its services can be provided through web-conferencing tools or in-person learning with hands-on displays. It also sells products through social media and in the community to help Native-Americans looking to make regalia and contemporary art.

Skenandore expects to launch an E-commerce website, along with a physical location in Green Bay, early in 2023. She says that winning the \$500 in prize money from the NEW Launch Alliance Pitch Event will enable her to place a larger wholesale order the next time that she orders supplies, helping her margins.

Others making entrepreneurial pitches at the competition were E-PT Solutions (presented by Fue Moua), GlobaLASEReach (presented by Diedre Cahill on behalf of Nolan Hetz), Nature Packaged (presented by Dan TenNapel), ReBOOK Travels (presented by Cody Kirchman), and The Honest Cannabis Company (presented by Joshua Dudley and Brittney Renee).

Judges for the pitch competition were Mark Burwell of Evolutions, Jake Erbs of WBD, Israel Squires of Midpoint Ventures, Anna Steinfest of AFF Research, and Nischal Thapa of the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

A total of 34 entrepreneurial pitches previously were made at local qualifying events across the New North region, held Nov. 14-18 during Startup Week in Wisconsin. These events – Audible, Fast Pitch, LevelUp and Accelerate Sheboygan County – were hosted by the Greater Green Bay Chamber, FVTC Venture Center, Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce, Envision Greater Fond du Lac, UW Oshkosh SBDC, UW Extension, Progress Lakeshore and Sheboygan County Economic Development Corp.

WBD Inc. and WEDC joined the NEW Launch Alliance of New North Inc. in supporting the local and regional pitch contests. The [NEW Launch Alliance](#) was formed to create a more robust and productive entrepreneurial ecosystem across the 18 counties of the New North region, connecting entrepreneurs, mentors, investors, educators, accelerators and other resources.

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About New North, Inc.

New North, Inc., is a 501(c)3 non-profit, regional economic development corporation fostering collaboration among private and public sector leaders throughout the 18 counties of Northeast Wisconsin, known as the New North region. The New North brand unites the region both internally and externally around talent development, brand promotion and business development, signifying the collective economic power behind the 18 counties. The counties include Outagamie, Winnebago, Calumet, Waupaca, Brown, Shawano, Oconto, Marinette, Door, Kewaunee, Sheboygan, Manitowoc, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Marquette, Florence, Menominee and Waushara. www.thenewnorth.com

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