

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **MEDIA CONTACT:**

Megan Gonzalez  
Executive Director  
University Marketing & Communications  
University of West Florida  
[MeganG@uwf.edu](mailto:MeganG@uwf.edu)  
Office: 850.474.2658  
Cell: 850.982.8836

### **Florida SBDC at UWF hosts Veterans Florida Entrepreneurship Program Business Plan Competition**

**Pensacola, Fla. – June 29, 2016** – The Florida Small Business Development Center at the University of West Florida recently hosted a business plan competition to conclude its inaugural Veterans Florida Entrepreneurship Program, an entrepreneurial training initiative for veterans in the state of Florida seeking to start their own businesses.

The program – piloted by UWF, in conjunction with the FSBDC Network and Military Veterans Resource Center – opened in March to more than 80 veterans. The first phase included online training, and the second involved three weekends of direct business training, mentoring and an optional business plan competition on the final day.

Bradley Cantrell of Fort Walton Beach, Robert Fuszner of Pensacola and Lee Hinman of Panama City had the top three business concepts. Cantrell won the competition with “Happy Hour Ice Cream,” an alcohol-infused ice cream parlor with non-alcoholic options also available. Fuszner came in second place with “StarChip Computers,” a solution for cybersecurity and computer aging issues. Hinman was the third place winner with “eMarket Places,” an improved search mechanism to find various, highly rated service contractors.

“The program educated me on the business model canvas where I learned how to research my ideas and find out if they were feasible,” Cantrell said. “The pitch was by far the most challenging component, but also the most valuable, because I now know what was missing from my plan.”

The competition gave participants the opportunity to hear comments and critiques from the judges and advice from program mentors, helping to bolster their ideas.

“My business model changed due to direct feedback and reflection,” Fuszner said. “Being part of the contest helped me better understand how my business model can work best in today’s market.”

Judges for the competition included three distinguished guests: Kathleen Baldwin, certified public accountant and certified construction industry financial professional with Warren

Averett CPAs and Advisors; Larry Strain, small business administration product specialist for government guaranteed lending with Synovus Bank; and Rick Duke, founding director of the UWF Center for Entrepreneurship. The judges said they were impressed with the overall program and the plans pitched to them for consideration.

“Simply preparing for a competition like the Veterans Florida Entrepreneurship business plan requires a significant level of commitment, learning, practice, thought and courage,” Duke said. “Regardless of the outcome, the value to them was the experience, which likely took them outside their comfort zone.”

Veterans Florida, the Florida SBDC Network, the UWF Military Veterans Resource Center and other partners in the program held a closing session in Tampa on June 27 and 28, where administrators discussed the program’s future and opportunities for expansion. Business mentoring from the Florida SBDC is available to all program participants.

The Veterans Florida Entrepreneurship Program is available to veterans who are active duty or have been honorably discharged; reside in Florida or plan to locate to Florida; and demonstrate a strong interest in entrepreneurship. The program is provided at no cost.

For more information about the Veterans Florida Entrepreneurship Program and business plan competition, contact [sbdcmarketing@uwf.edu](mailto:sbdcmarketing@uwf.edu).

###

**About the [Florida SBDC at UWF](#):** The Florida SBDC at UWF is a member of the Florida SBDC Network, a non-profit network of college and university-based centers providing entrepreneurs with high quality one-on-one consulting, management training and vital information they need to grow and prosper in a complex and competitive global environment. Based in the University of West Florida College of Business, the SBDC at UWF has helped prospective and existing small business owners form, grow and sustain successful businesses for 40 years. Serving Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Holmes, Jackson, Washington, Bay, and Calhoun counties, the Florida SBDC at UWF maintains full service offices in Pensacola, Fort Walton Beach and Panama City.

**About the [University of West Florida](#):** Founded in 1963, the University of West Florida is a vibrant, distinctive institution of higher learning with undergraduate, graduate and targeted research programs. With multiple locations in Northwest Florida, the University serves a student population of more than 12,000. Dedicated to helping students realize their full potential, UWF favors small class sizes with quality teacher-scholars who deliver personalized, innovative, hands-on learning and leadership opportunities.