



PRESS RELEASE - *For Immediate Release*

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SISTER BEES WINS \$50,000 IN MASON COUNTY BUSINESS CONTEST; CYNTHIA LANG PILATES WINS \$5,000 SECOND PLACE PRIZE OF \$5,000

Beeswax Skin Care Product Business Looks to Sell Product Nationally as Winner of Fourth Annual Momentum Business Plan Competition

LUDINGTON, Mich., *Sept. 26, 2018* – Good things do come in small packages, as natural skin care product business [Sister Bees](#) can attest after winning \$50,000 last Friday in Mason County's [Momentum Business Plan Competition](#).

The maker of beeswax skin care products was selected out of four other finalists in front of a panel of judges and a packed auditorium in a "Shark Tank"-style pitch Sept. 21 at the Ludington Area Center for the Arts. Cynthia Lang of [Cynthia Lang Pilates](#) took home \$5,000 for second prize.

Friday's pitch night was the culmination of a rigorous process for finalists in the fourth annual Momentum Business Plan Competition, administered by the [Ludington & Scottville Area Chamber of Commerce](#) and funded by [Pennies from Heaven Foundation](#), which awards one entrepreneur \$50,000 to start or relocate an early-stage business in Mason County. Eligible contestants submitted business plans by July 31, after which they were short-listed to five finalists who presented to a panel of judges last Friday. Contestants were each given five minutes to highlight their plans, followed by seven minutes of questions from the judges. The competition's board of directors served as the judges, who are Mason County business leaders: John Wilson, CEO of Western Land Services; Kathy Maclean, president and CEO of the Ludington & Scottville Area Chamber of Commerce; Tom Paine, president of Metalworks; Ray Biggs, president and CEO of West Shore Bank; and Jim Scatena, local business leader. Cheryl Freeman and Wendy Morrow, co-owners of All Occasions Events and Floral and the 2017 Momentum winner, served as guest judges.

"Pitch Night is always a fun and exciting evening in which the entire community comes out to cheer on our finalists," said Kathy Maclean, Ludington & Scottville Area Chamber of Commerce president and a Momentum judge. "The Momentum Competition celebrates and highlights entrepreneurs of Mason County, and their investment and passion in their dreams creates a vibe that makes Ludington a special place to live and work."

Sister Bees Takes Top Prize of \$50,000

Co-owners Kim Ambrose, Amber Boerema and Kelly Bonnema, the second presenters determined through a random drawing, pitched the judges on [Sister Bees](#), a company that creates all-natural skin care products from beeswax. Sister Bees (named initially because friends Kim Ambrose and Amber Boerema were as close as sisters but became more literal when Ambrose's sister Kelly Bonnema joined the business) began three years ago when the women realized that the beeswax byproduct from beehives kept at Ambrose's home for making honey was a valuable and healing ingredient for the skin. Sister Bees also won \$5,000 in the [Momentum 5x5 Night](#) a few weeks earlier that secured the business a spot in the Top 10 of the Momentum Business Plan Competition.

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Making the products out of their homes, the Sister Bees team produces a line of nine natural, chemical-free lip balms (with flavors such as coffee vanilla, peppermint and chai) and four, two-ounce body moisturizers with essential oils (including Bee Butter, Beard Balm, Worker Bee for men and Paw Putty for pets) sold at more than 35 retail stores in West Michigan from South Haven to Petoskey, pop-up markets and craft fairs, and online through its website, sisterbees.com.

“We are so appreciative of this award and know that \$50,000 will have a huge impact on Sister Bees, but we are equally excited about the relationships of the five judges,” said Amber Boerema, Sister Bees co-owner. “We are confident that we will glean so much from their expertise.”

With the help of the Momentum grant, Sister Bees plans to expand its online sales channel, implement a digital marketing strategy, and attend industry trade shows in hopes of getting noticed by regional and national retailers to ultimately grow business nationally. The owners also are looking into equipment to help them manufacture and produce more products.

Second Place Prize of \$5,000 Awarded to Cynthia Lang Pilates

A second place prize of \$5,000 provided by the [Mason County Growth Alliance](#) was awarded to Cynthia Lang of [Cynthia Lang Pilates](#) at 913 S. Washington St., a classical Pilates studio offering private and group classes as well as individual sessions to cater to specific client needs. Lang, also one of the five finalists in the 2017 Momentum Competition, wishes to create a website, build a certified team to meet the needs for more clients, and become a certified teacher trainer. Her long-term goal is to set up satellite studios in Manistee and Fremont.

“This competition is all about helping small businesses like Sister Bees and Cynthia Lang Pilates grow and flourish in Mason County,” said Maclean. “We are thrilled for Sister Bees – they have an amazing product that has great potential on a national stage. And Cynthia Lang’s second place prize should help her attain at least one of her business goals. She’s such an asset to our community.”

Other Finalists

Contest finalists in addition to the top two included (in order based on presentation):

- [Leta's Educational Child Care](#), *Leta Bowman, Ludington*. For eight years, Leta Bowman has offered childcare and educational learning in Ludington. This year, she expanded her business to open a child care learning center at 900 N. Washington Ave. focused on offering high-quality care in a safe, clean and healthy environment for children to succeed.
- [The Lake House](#), *Jeff and Jean White, Ludington*. Recently breaking ground in late August, the Lake House will be a premier venue to host indoor and outdoor events, with views of the Ludington harbor, S.S. Badger, marina and sunsets. The estimated opening date is early July 2019.
- [HumaniTea](#), *Carmen Biggs and Chris Turnbull, Ludington*. Opened in June 2018 at 127 S. James St. in downtown Ludington, this tea shop offers responsibly sourced organic loose-leaf teas, in addition to fairly-traded artisan merchandise from local and global crafters. The retail space and consumer dollars help fund anti-human trafficking efforts.

2017 Winner All Occasions Events and Floral Thriving

In addition to the five finalists' presentations, 2017 Momentum Business Plan Competition winners Cheryl Freeman and Wendy Morrow, sisters and co-owners of [All Occasions Events and Floral](#), presented how they have grown and expanded their business since winning \$50,000 at last year's competition. Freeman and Morrow continue to meet regularly with the Momentum Board of Directors for business consultation.

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"People think \$50,000 is the prize, but it's just as important to have the mentors," said Cheryl Freeman about receiving mentoring from the judges as part of winning the competition. "The money certainly catapulted our plans forward, but we also have access to these incredible business minds to help us get there."

With the 2017 Momentum grant, the sisters purchased key equipment for the floral side of the business, including walk-in and display coolers. They also expanded their product line, adding an automated floral delivery service for businesses to receive fresh flowers weekly or monthly, and a personal shopper service for individuals.

On the event side, they are running a robust business with more than 25 events booked in 2018 – exceeding the sisters' expectations and adding new events every week. They also have purchased new specialty items such as décor items, Chiavari chairs, and two 10x10 tents with windowed walls, allowing them to expand beyond weddings and accommodate more events. In the future, the sisters plan to hire more people to assist with the day-to-day work so they can focus on running the business, implement a training program for those interested in the industry so that they can take on more clients, and build a storage building to warehouse their inventory.

About the Momentum Business Plan Competition

Launched in 2015, the Momentum Business Plan Competition awards one business entrepreneur a prize of \$50,000 to start or move an early-stage business to Mason County. Funded by Pennies from Heaven Foundation and administered by the Ludington & Scottville Area Chamber of Commerce, the competition is open to eligible independent for-profit or non-profit ventures with a viable business idea, plan or invention; or existing organizations or companies with less than \$100,000 in sales or revenue annually. The competition idea was spearheaded by Pennies from Heaven Foundation founder John Wilson, who was searching for a way to foster and grow the existing entrepreneurial spirit of Mason County where he made his business mark. Additional support is provided by Ludington Daily News, Ludington SCORE, Metalworks, West Shore Community College and West Shore Bank - who all share a passion for entrepreneurship and the Mason County community. More information is available at momentumstartup.org and facebook.com/momentumstartup.

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