MASON COUNTY BUSINESS COMPETITION AWARDS $50K IN PRIZE MONEY TO FIVE AREA BUSINESSES IN FIFTH ANNUAL CONTEST, SPLITTING PRIZE FOR FIRST TIME AMONG ALL CONTESTANTS

Ludington DIY Art Business Inspired Parties Takes Home $14,000 as First Place Winner, Four Other Contestants Also Each Win $9,000

LUDINGTON, Mich., May 22, 2019 – Five Ludington area businesses just got a boost of confidence – and a sizable chunk of change – in Mason County’s fifth annual Momentum Business Plan Competition Pitch Night May 17. Inspired Parties art business of Ludington was awarded $14,000 as the top winner, and the other contestants also each received $9,000: Art by Mary Case, HumaniTea, Leta’s Educational Daycare and The Tailor Shop.

Momentum Business Plan Competition administrators added a new twist to this year’s competition that typically awards one entrepreneur $50,000 to start or relocate an early-stage business in Mason County. This year, judges had full discretion to allocate the funds as they chose across the board to the five finalists.

Friday’s Pitch Night at the Ludington Area Center for the Arts was the culmination of a rigorous process for finalists in the fifth annual Momentum Business Plan Competition, administered by the Ludington & Scottville Area Chamber of Commerce and funded by Pennies from Heaven Foundation, which awards entrepreneurs $50,000 to start or relocate an early-stage business in Mason County. Contestants submitted business plans by April 4 that were short-listed to five finalists, who presented to a panel of judges May 17. Contestants were each given five minutes to review their plans, followed by seven minutes of questions from the judges.

“This was an especially exciting year for the Momentum Competition since the judges could award the prize money any way they chose,” said Tom Hinman, talent and entrepreneur development coordinator for the Ludington & Scottville Area Chamber of Commerce. “The essence of this competition is about helping small businesses thrive in Mason County – and by changing up the contest a bit, we were able to spread the wealth and have a greater impact on more small businesses in Mason County.”

In addition to the largest monetary prize, Inspired Parties also receives professional support services plus business counseling through the Momentum board of directors, which includes Raymond Biggs, president/CEO of West Shore Bank; John Wilson, CEO of Western Land Services and chair/founder of Pennies from Heaven Foundation; Thomas Paine, president/CEO of Metalworks Inc.; Kathy Maclean, co-owner of Spindrift Cylesports; and Jim Scatena, management consultant.

Inspired Parties Takes Top Prize of $14,000
Sarah Stechschulte, owner of Inspired Parties of Ludington, was awarded $14,000 as the top winner of the 2019 Momentum Business Plan Competition. Open since 2016, Inspired Parties offers social art events and DIY crafting parties, with a focus on step-by-step paintings and projects, in Mason County. The business caters to individuals of all ages, any size group, and any special occasion or event (e.g., kids’ birthdays, bachelorette parties, corporate events, church groups, family reunions). Stechschulte’s goal is to give clients a creative experience in a “judgment-free” environment. She hosts workshops both at her Inspired Parties studio, plus at local businesses who hold art parties at their establishments.

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A Class of 2012 Ludington High School graduate who received her associate in arts degree at West Shore Community College where she studied painting and pottery, Stechschulte started her art career at Petri Gallery in Pentwater working for one of her WSCC instructors. In the summer of 2016 while she was exhibiting and selling her work at Shagway Arts Barn in Mason County, the owner encouraged her to teach a monthly painting class. Stechschulte’s classes grew from 2 to 10 attendees by the end of that summer – and in November 2016, she opened Inspired Parties and taught painting classes at locations around Mason County. In December 2018, Stechschulte opened a permanent space at a building on Jebavy Drive to hold her workshops.

“This feels pretty unbelievable to win the Momentum Competition,” said Stechschulte. “I’m really grateful for this opportunity – not only for the prize money and judges’ support, but also for the process in preparing for the Momentum Competition that really opened my eyes to how I can help the community and support others. I want to make good use of the funds and bring something very unique to the community.”

With the Momentum funds, Stechschulte will expand her service offerings by adding a drop-in workshop area with open hours where people can stop in and create a project of their choosing from a menu of options. She plans to offer 10 new types of classes beyond canvas painting, including wood sign painting, DIY painted door mats, jewelry stamping, succulent planting classes with painted pots, tie-dye clothes and bags, painted pillows and more. She also will hire an employee to manage the drop-in workshop on a daily basis.

Second Place Prizes Awarded
The remaining four finalists were named Second Place Winners and received $9,000 each:

**Art by Mary Case, Mary Case, Ludington.** Her business includes a retail store, art gallery and studio, offering classes to all ages. Case plans to update her building on Dowland Street, adding classroom space and an improved restroom facility. *2018 finalist.*

**HumaniTea, Carmen Biggs and Chris Turnbull, Ludington.** The owners’ passion for assisting victims of human trafficking led to opening this tea and artisan gift shop to generate dollars to fund anti-human trafficking efforts. The duo plans to upgrade the downtown operations, as well as purchase AV equipment for education and awareness events. *2018 finalist.*

**Let's Educational Daycare, Leta Bowman, Ludington.** Bowman prides herself in providing a clean and healthy environment for children’s success through care, faith and education at each child’s pace. She plans to upgrade and expand her facility on Washington Avenue. *2018 finalist.*

**The Tailor Shop, Tracy Sheid, Ludington.** In business on Filer Street for two years, the company provides professional tailoring services and outsourced laundry and dry cleaning services. Sheid plans to upgrade tailoring services and start her own laundry and dry cleaning business.

“The audience at the Momentum Competition Pitch Night got to watch passion in action last Friday, led by Sarah Stechschulte of Inspired Parties,” said John Wilson, chair of the Momentum board, CEO of Western Land Services, and chair of the Pennies from Heaven Foundation funding the contest. “As judges, we see the contestants’ businesses plans, meet them before their presentations, and ultimately work with the winners. It is a treat to work with these passionate people, a key ingredient to these small businesses and what makes doing business in Mason County so great. Thank you to all the Momentum contestants for sharing your passion.”

2018 Competition Winner Sister Bees Thriving
Last year’s competition winners, Amber Boerema and Kim Ambrose, also presented how they have expanded their **Sister Bees** business with the $50,000 prize money. This Ludington skincare company that makes its products from beeswax has propelled forward by rebranding, expanding its product line and extending its coverage area to 131 stores across the United States and Canada, leading to increased sales.
Momentum 5x5 Night
Momentum will conclude the year with its second annual Momentum 5X5 Night hosted and sponsored by Epworth Assembly and Epworth Church Association Aug. 7 at 6 p.m. at Epworth Heights Auditorium, 1161 N. Lakeshore Dr., Ludington. Five applicants will pitch their business ideas for five minutes each in front of four judges and a live audience as a fifth judge in the event of a tie, with the chance to win a $5,000 prize. The contest opens June 1, with the entry deadline of July 19. More information can be found at momentumstartup.org/momentum-5x5-night.

About the Momentum Business Plan Competition
Launched in 2015, the Momentum Business Plan Competition awards business entrepreneurs prizes of up to $50,000 for a new or early-stage business in 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 $250,000 in sales or revenue annually. The competition was spearheaded by Pennies from Heaven Foundation founder John Wilson, with additional support by Ludington Daily News, Ludington SCORE, Metalworks, West Shore Community College and West Shore Bank. More than $260,000 has been awarded to 12 business applicants over the five years of the competition. momentumstartup.org.

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Photos (please credit the Ludington & Scottville Area Chamber of Commerce):
- Sarah Stechschulte inside her Inspired Parties Studio with $14K check
- Inspired Parties on stage at Pitch Night with judges (L to R: Jim Scatena, management consultant; Tom Paine, Metalworks Inc.; Sarah Stechschulte, Inspired Parties; John Wilson, Western Land Services/Pennies from Heaven Foundation; Ray Biggs, West Shore Bank; Kathy Maclean, Spindrift Cyclesports)
- All 2019 contestants on stage with checks and judges (L to R: Tom Paine, Metalworks Inc.; Chris Turnbull and Carmen Biggs, HumaniTea; Kathy Maclean, Spindrift Cyclesports; Mary Case, Art by Mary Case; Ray Biggs, West Shore Bank; Jim Scatena, management consultant; Sarah Stechschulte, Inspired Parties; John Wilson, Western Land Services/Pennies from Heaven Foundation; Tracy Sheid, The Tailor Shop; and Leta Bowman, Leta’s Educational Daycare – front row-kneeling)