

FISCAL YEAR 2023 - 2024

# IMPACT REPORT

The current ammonia production process

- The dirtiest chemical process on earth.
- Emits 2% of all CO<sub>2</sub> emissions yearly.
- Uses 1-2% of global energy demand.

**UConn**

CONNECTICUT CENTER  
FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
AND INNOVATION



# IN THIS ISSUE

01	Photographs
02	Mission & Vision
03	Impact In Numbers
05	New Spaces @ CCEI
07	Programmatic Updates: Get Seeded, Traction
08	Newsworthy Highlights: UConn Joins NSF Hub
09	Summer Fellowship Accelerator
10	Newsworthy Highlights: The Wolff New Venture Competition
12	Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans
13	Programmatic Updates: Family Business Program, BUILD Hartford, Entrepreneurial Leadership Program
15	Student Ambassador Program
17	Newsworthy Highlights: The Collaboratory @ CCEI
19	Ecosystem Collaborations: Conference Engagements
20	Ecosystem Collaborations: Launc[H]
21	Meet Our Team
23	Alumni Spotlight: Levo International
25	Alumni Spotlight: LambdaVision
27	Alumni Spotlight: SedMed Inc.
29	Alumni Updates
30	Photographs
31	Sponsors, Partners, Donors

# A NOTE FROM US

This was the year of **momentum**.

We saw record growth of participation in our programs — demand for entrepreneurship programs is high — and we were determined to reduce barriers to entry and find ways for entrepreneurs to engage with CCEI. With that in mind, we set out with the **intention** to strengthen our initiatives and build the capacity to scale.

And we believe we did that.

We were invited to join the NSF I-Corps Northeast Hub, which has allowed us to expand upon our 10-year history with the NSF I-Corps initiative to provide training to faculty, postdocs, and graduate students commercializing deep technologies at UConn and across the Northeast. We transformed our Traction program from a cohort-based approach to an open workshop series, bringing our community relevant and engaging sessions to support entrepreneurs as they are launching and growing their businesses.

We launched *Timely Topics*, a podcast discussing issues entrepreneurs often navigate, as well as highlighting the vibrant business ecosystem here in Connecticut. We created The Founder's Lounge, an incubator located in Storrs and in Hartford, to bring together student founders actively looking for collaboration and support.

This upcoming year, we are looking forward to celebrating the 15th anniversary of our Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans program, expanding our Wolff New Venture Competition to showcase the top startups being built at UConn, and continuing to partner with organizations both in and outside of Connecticut.

Together, we're continuing to **strengthen our ecosystem** and our mission of inspiring entrepreneurship and innovation at UConn and beyond.

— The Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship  
and Innovation (CCEI) Team









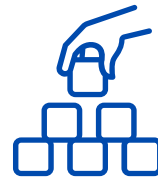


# MISSION AND VISION

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP. STARTS. HERE.

At CCEI, we value strengthening our community, empowering effective communication, and cultivating purposeful learning amongst entrepreneurs. Ultimately, we inspire a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation across all academic disciplines throughout UConn, to entrepreneurs and businesses across Connecticut, and to alumni worldwide.

We support and engage a diverse population of entrepreneurs from every school and college across UConn. We strive to build, develop, and connect entrepreneurs to assist them in their venture development journey. Our mission is to continually provide resources and mentorship that drive entrepreneurial success and foster a vibrant startup ecosystem. By nurturing creativity and resilience, we aim to transform innovative ideas into viable ventures. Through collaboration and a commitment to excellence, we envision a future where our entrepreneurs lead impactful change globally.



### BUILD

We build ventures through programs that help support ideation, concept development, market and customer validation, business model creation, proof of concept, and initial launch into the market.



### DEVELOP

We develop entrepreneurs to become successful leaders within their organizations and beyond. Through mentorship and guidance, we empower individuals to navigate challenges, seize opportunities, and leave a legacy of excellence.



### CONNECT

We connect entrepreneurs to an extensive network of resources and industry experts to help them launch and grow successful companies. Creating a supportive ecosystem allows for collaboration and strategic partnerships.

“

**We would not be here today without everything we learned from CCEI, and the amazing network and investors that we got pitching.**

— JEREMY BRONEN '20 (ENG) | FOUNDER, SEDMED INC.



# IMPACT IN NUMBERS

FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024

**\$ 325,390**

PROVIDED IN VENTURE FUNDING

**\$ 50,750**

PROVIDED IN SCHOLARSHIP AND INTERNSHIP FUNDING

**\$ 316M+**

RAISED IN FOLLOW-ON FUNDING BY PROGRAM ALUMNI (SINCE 2015)\*

**\$ 88.5M+**

GENERATED IN REVENUE BY PROGRAM ALUMNI (SINCE 2015)\*

**153**



ventures supported

⚡ UP 24% FROM LAST YEAR

**391**



entrepreneurs supported

⚡ UP 48% FROM LAST YEAR

**36**



workshops & events hosted

**145**

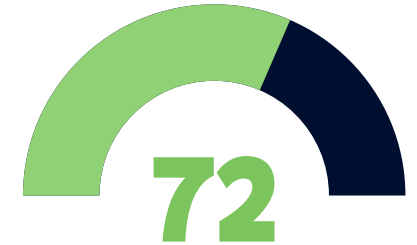


mentors engaged



UConn SCHOOLS/  
COLLEGES REPRESENTED

⚡ UP 17% FROM LAST YEAR



UConn MAJORS/  
DEPARTMENTS REPRESENTED

⚡ UP 26% FROM LAST YEAR

## AWARDS & RECOGNITION



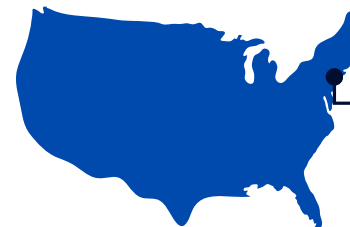
**#41**

FOR TOP  
UNDERGRADUATE  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
PROGRAMS



**#28**

FOR TOP  
GRADUATE  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
PROGRAMS



**#6**

IN THE NORTHEAST REGION  
FOR UNDERGRADUATE  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
STUDIES IN 2024

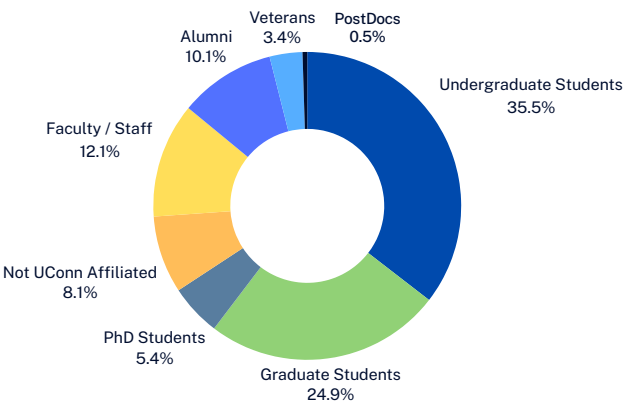
**#5**

IN THE NORTHEAST  
REGION FOR GRADUATE  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
STUDIES IN 2024



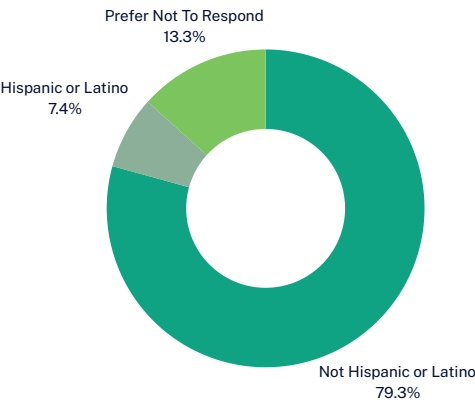
Populations Served

Of all participants, **60.4%** were undergraduate and graduate students.



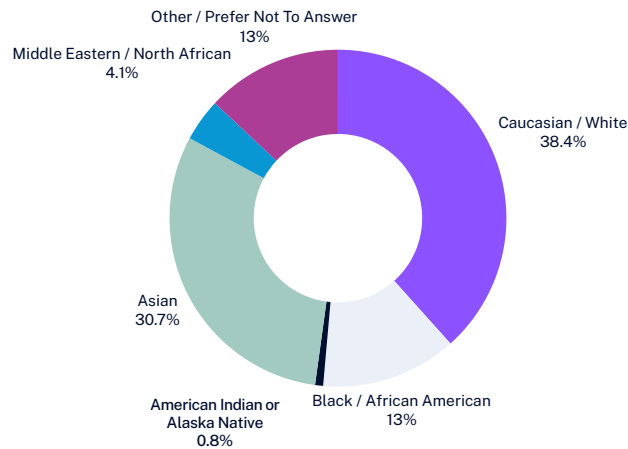
Ethnicity Breakout

**7.4%** of individuals identified as ‘Hispanic or Latino’ this year.



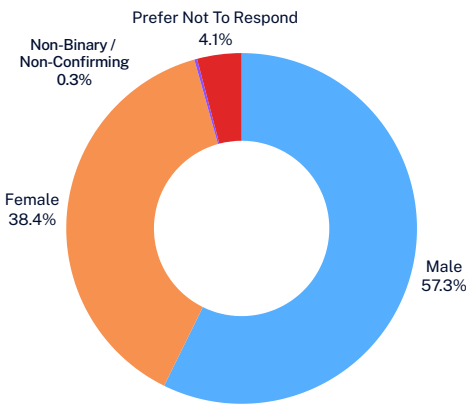
Race Breakout

Minority-identifying populations totaled **48.6%** this year.



Gender Breakout

About **2 in every 5** participants identified as female.



Collecting statistical data for CCEI provides insights into the demographics, needs, and challenges of our participants. By understanding the composition of our entrepreneurial community, our center can tailor programs, resources, and support services to better meet the diverse needs of our populations. Armed with this information, CCEI can measure the impact of our programmatic initiatives over time.

This year, we have focused on increasing participation from underserved populations, which aligns with our broader goals of fostering diversity and inclusion in entrepreneurship.

This approach not only enriches our entrepreneurial ecosystem by bringing in a wider range of perspectives and experiences, but contributes to building a more equitable society where everyone has the opportunity to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions.

// PICTURED:  
Program Manager  
Nicholas Martinelli  
(left) awarding a  
program  
certification to Keri-  
lynn Yonika (right),  
Founder of You Me  
and OT.



5.4K+

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS



5.9K+

EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS

\* DATA COMES FROM SELF-REPORTED SURVEYS AND PUBLICLY-AVAILABLE INFORMATION. IT IS NOT EXHAUSTIVE.



# NEW SPACES @ CCEI

## Powering entrepreneurship through collaboration.

This year, CCEI expanded its footprint by introducing two dynamic spaces within our Hartford and Storrs locations, each catering to distinct facets of entrepreneurial growth and community development. Both of these additions underscore CCEI's commitment to cultivating an ecosystem that not only supports startups, but prioritizes community engagement and outreach.

Adding innovative spaces is crucial for fostering both creativity and collaboration, which are essential in driving forward-thinking solutions. These enhancements enable us to better serve our community by providing the resources and environment necessary for ideas to flourish.

## The Founder's Lounge @ CCEI

Are you ready to elevate your entrepreneurial spirit in our innovative co-working space? At The Founder's Lounge, we're now offering an environment where entrepreneurs can collaborate, create, and advertise. The space provides: locked storage, the display of accepted startups and their logos, ample room to meet with cofounders/teammates, and a private meeting space available to reserve.

The Founder's Lounge is open to all undergraduate and graduate students working on a business, with a limited number of teams accepted into the incubator each semester.

// PICTURED: The Founder's Lounge space in Hartford, CT.



## The Collaboratory @ CCEI

Our Hartford location welcomed The Collaboratory, a hub designed to foster collaboration among diverse innovators, startups, and industry experts. This space aims to create an environment that propels innovative ideas to fruition.

Through curated curriculums and contemporary digital tools, The Collaboratory has the ability to equip clients with the techniques required to convey their innovative visions with clarity, impact, and authenticity. The space provides digital content production, entrepreneurial communication, and pitch coaching.

Within The Collaboratory, CCEI launched the Timely Topics podcast, hosted by Dr. Rory McGloin and Jennifer Mathieu. Through this podcast, CCEI has the ability to cultivate a community focused on current events and contemporary business topics.

**It's been a valuable experience to be a part of launching this podcast and seeing it built from the ground up!**

”

— EMILY LAPUT '26 (CLAS) | THE COLLABORATORY STUDENT INTERN



“

**Aside from learning everything that I know from CCEI, they gave me an incredible network of mentors and a community of other student entrepreneurs that I am lucky enough to continue working with on a day-to-day basis.**

— AMELIA MARTIN '23 '25 (CAHNR) | CEO & FOUNDER, MUD RAT



// PICTURED: Amelia Martin '23 '25 (CAHNR), CEO & founder of Mud Rat, pitching at the 2023 Summer Fellowship finale.



# GET SEEDED PITCH NIGHTS

**A platform for aspiring student entrepreneurs.**

Get Seeded offers students across UConn the opportunity to pitch their business ideas to a live, virtual audience. This audience then votes on which ideas receive funding. Selected students have the chance to earn up to \$1,000 in seed funding and gain support from peers who may be interested in joining their business ventures.

This year, the program hosted seven virtual pitch nights, providing 44 entrepreneurs with the chance to present their ideas. The venture concepts ranged widely, showcasing the diversity and creativity of the UConn student body. Get Seeded is proudly sponsored by Santander Bank.

## Get Seeded Demo Day

The spring semester marked the fourth annual Get Seeded Demo Day, where the top teams from the year presented their unique ideas to a panel of alumni judges — the “Huskies” in the Husky Den. The top three teams at Demo Day received additional funding, with the first place team earning \$5,000 to further develop their project.

This event also invited the broader UConn community to participate by voting alongside the judges, providing an opportunity to witness UConn’s innovative spirit in action and contribute to the growth of budding entrepreneurs. This year’s esteemed panel of judges included Shay Cantner ’13 (NEAG), co-founder and CEO of Elea; Armin Rad, Ph.D. ’20 (ENG), co-founder and CEO of Encapsulate; and Jake Winter ’23 (ENG), co-founder and CTO of PatentPlus AI.

The winners included:

**\$5,000 Prize — Sponsored by Santander Bank**  
AccessFlora — Keegan Jalbert ’23 (CLAS); Diana Pinta ’25 (CLAS)

**\$2,500 Prize — Sponsored by UConn’s Werth Institute**  
eKardia — Adeline Richard ’26 (ENG); Arav Parikh ’24 (ENG); Meijin Hsiao ’26 (NUR); Paris Bazemore ’27 (ENG)

**\$1,000 Prize — Sponsored by UConn’s School of Business**  
EngramX — Marc Benoit ’25 (MED)

Get Seeded continues to be a cornerstone program for UConn’s entrepreneurial ecosystem, highlighting the potential within our student body and fostering the next generation of business leaders.

7

PITCH NIGHTS  
HOSTED

\$22K

PROVIDED IN  
SEED FUNDING

44

ENTREPRENEURS  
SUPPORTED

# TRACTION WORKSHOPS

**Expanding support and resources for students.**

Central to our venture-development efforts is Traction, a program initially launched to provide early-stage business support and help students validate their ideas with potential customers. Recognizing the growing needs of student entrepreneurs, we significantly expanded the program, adding new components to offer a more robust and comprehensive support system.



// PICTURED: CCEI Lead Instructor Michelle Cote facilitating a discussion.

The enhanced program included 11 virtual workshops across two semesters led by program instructors. The workshops covered a range of topics essential for entrepreneurial success, including: business model development, marketing strategies, financial planning, and more. By attending these sessions, students gained insights and knowledge to apply to their ventures. Students had access to office hours with speakers, providing personalized guidance and advice tailored to their specific challenges.

Additionally, a new point-tracking system was introduced to incentivize student participation and engagement. As students progressed through the program, they had the ability to earn points based on their involvement and achievements. Points could be redeemed for seed funding, providing support to help bring their ideas to life.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the expanded program included an application process for students to join an incubation space. This co-working space offered an environment where student entrepreneurs could work on their ventures, network with peers, and access additional resources.

The expansion of Traction underscores CCEI’s dedication to nurturing student entrepreneurs. It not only validates and supports ideas, but empowers students to turn their visions into reality. The venture funding for Traction is proudly sponsored by UConn’s Werth Institute.

11

WORKSHOPS  
HOSTED

\$2.3K+

PROVIDED IN  
VENTURE FUNDING

134+

ENTREPRENEURS  
SUPPORTED

# NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION INVITES UCONN TO JOIN PRESTIGIOUS PARTNERSHIP

In addition to UConn, Princeton, and Yale, the Northeast hub includes Rutgers University, University of Delaware, Delaware State University, Lehigh University, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Rowan University, Temple University, and Drexel University.

By Claire Hall | Originally published in UConn Today



// PICTURED: Emily Yale '21 (ENG), one of three inaugural students in UConn's Master's of Engineering in Global Entrepreneurship program, with her autonomous robot. (Sean Flynn/UConn Photo)

The University of Connecticut has joined the National Science Foundation I-Corps Hub Northeast Region, a prestigious appointment that will allow the university to serve more entrepreneurs seeking to develop scientific and technological innovations.

The I-Corps Hub Northeast Region is a coalition of universities that provides programs to help faculty, researchers, and graduate students develop tech and scientific discoveries into businesses that can benefit society. UConn will be in a division with Yale, Princeton, and eight other colleges.

"The School of Business welcomes this opportunity to expand entrepreneurial development in such compelling areas," said Dean John A. Elliott. "The innovations from the scientific community offer profoundly important medical, health, and societal benefits,

while new technology produces access to exciting and vital tools for almost every avenue of life."

"One of the things we do exceptionally well at UConn is to guide entrepreneurs on their journey to success, and I'm pleased that we will now be able to serve even more aspiring business leaders," he said.

The I-Corps program, housed in the Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation (CCEI), offers training, mentoring, and resources to startup hopefuls. Initially, teams attend a four-session program to identify whether their innovation meets consumer needs.

After finishing the course, those teams may apply to attend NSF's more advanced programs and receive a \$50,000 small-business funding grant.

"We are excited to grow the Hub's capacity to nurture the next generation of innovators and business leaders in collaboration with UConn and its ecosystem," said Rodney Priestley, co-director of the I-Corps Hub Northeast Region and the Dean of the Graduate School at Princeton University.

"This expansion will bring I-Corps training to greater numbers of researchers, including individuals traditionally underrepresented in entrepreneurship, who are making discoveries in healthcare, materials, energy, and many other areas that are critical for our future."

The NSF launched I-Corps to develop and nurture a national innovation ecosystem that builds upon fundamental research to facilitate the application of scientific discoveries closer to the development of technologies, products, and processes that benefit society.

In 2014, UConn was among the first universities to be identified as a partner in that effort, which soon led to the creation of Accelerate UConn, a program that supports entrepreneurs and serves as UConn's NSF I-Corps site. Some 200 startup teams have graduated from that program.

With this new Northeast Hub affiliation, UConn has the resources to mentor scientific and technology innovation and

commercialization both locally and across the Northeast.

Jennifer Mathieu, the executive director of CCEI, a part of the School of Business, noted that CCEI has had tremendous success in supporting new entrepreneurs through the I-Corps programming over the last nine years.

"CCEI has created a substantial infrastructure for new venture development and an environment in which these teams receiving I-Corps training have clear next-step opportunities post program," she said. "We know that this new partnership will allow us to support more entrepreneurs and provide them with additional opportunities for success. This is a truly exciting and significant development for our entrepreneurs, and for those who will benefit from their ideas."

Caroline Dealy, a professor at UConn Health, agrees.

"As a UConn faculty member and founder of a tech startup myself, I found UConn's I-Corps program, Accelerate UConn, invaluable for moving my technology forward," she said.

"Now, as faculty liaison for the program, I'm committed to sharing its benefits with others at UConn, so they can learn how best to advance their own technologies to the benefit of health and society through commercialization."

4

COHORTS  
HELD

131

ENTREPRENEURS  
SUPPORTED

55

VENTURES  
SUPPORTED

\$36K

PROVIDED IN  
VENTURE FUNDING



Want to get involved? We are currently accepting registrations and applications for Accelerate UConn's Novus and Propelus programs!

Visit the QR code to learn more.

## UPCOMING ACCELERATE UCONN PROGRAMS:

**Propelus**  
September 6 - 26, 2024  
In-Person & Online

**Novus**  
September 20, 2024  
11:30am-1:30pm  
In-Person

**Propelus**  
**Quantum/Photonics Themed**  
October 10 - 31, 2024  
Online

**Propelus**  
November 8 - December 5, 2024  
In-Person & Online





// PICTURED: The 2023 Summer Fellowship cohort at their program finale.

# SUMMER FELLOWSHIP ACCELERATOR

Featuring the top startups coming out of UConn each year.

The top ten startups from across UConn were hand-selected to participate in our Summer Fellowship experience. This program took place three days a week over eight weeks, where founders developed the skills needed to bring new products, services, and technologies to market.

The 2023 Summer Fellowship cohort engaged in a transformative journey that deepened their understanding of entrepreneurship and equipped them with essential skills for success in the startup world. Throughout the program, founders

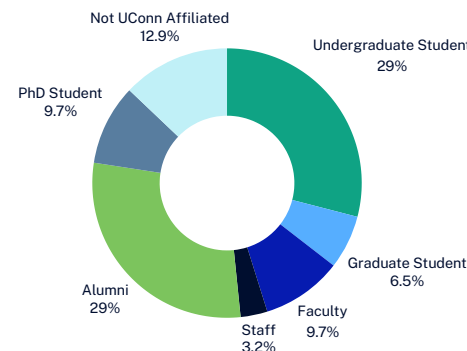
immersed themselves in a rigorous curriculum designed to foster innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurial thinking. They had the opportunity to work closely with experienced mentors and industry experts, gaining valuable insights into market analysis, product development, financial planning, and business strategy.

Through hands-on workshops, seminars, and networking events, they honed their entrepreneurial journey, refined their business ideas, and learned how to navigate the challenges and opportunities of launching

and scaling a startup. By the end of the program, the startups emerged not only with concrete business plans and prototypes, but with newfound confidence and resilience.

CCEI's 2023 Summer Fellowship Accelerator was proudly sponsored by Digital Surgeons, Fiondella, Milone & LaSaracina LLP, and BD Emerson Legal Group.

Meet our 2024 Summer Fellowship cohort and learn more about the program by visiting [ccei.uconn.edu/summer-fellowship](https://ccei.uconn.edu/summer-fellowship).



2023 Summer Fellowship Status Breakout

“

**All the knowledge, mentoring, and coaching I received has helped me tremendously in developing my business. I don't think would be this far along without the help of Summer Fellowship and the CCEI team.**

— CHRISTINA PHILLIPS (BUS) | FOUNDER, PUURE

**40+**  
MENTORS  
ENGAGED

**\$150K**  
PROVIDED IN  
VENTURE FUNDING

**10**  
STARTUPS  
ACCEPTED



# WOLFF ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMPETITION CROWNS STARTUP THAT BRINGS EMOTIONAL-COPING SKILLS TO ELEMENTARY-AGE KIDS

The Wolff competition awarded almost \$60,000 in funds for UConn-affiliated startups.

By Claire Hall | Originally published in UConn Today

The entrepreneurs who created Feel Your Best Self, a startup focused on social-emotional learning for elementary school-aged students, won the highly coveted Wolff New Venture Competition and a \$25,000 prize on Tuesday night.

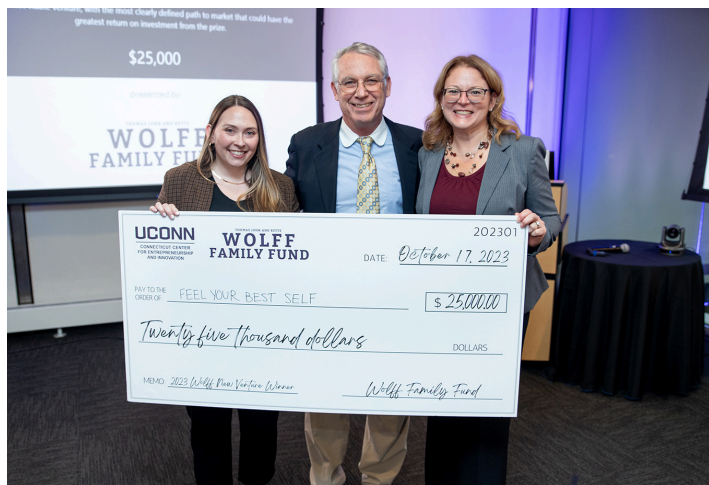
Arguably, though, it is hundreds of young students who will be the ultimate beneficiaries of the award, as it will allow Feel Your Best Self to grow significantly and reach more youngsters, teachers and guidance counselors.

Some 75 percent of students suffer from at least one bout of severe anxiety in school, says Sandy Chafouleas, a school psychologist and Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor at the Neag School of Education.

“When kids don’t feel well, they don’t do well in school, in sports, or in life,” she says. “And it’s not just a few kids. It is a lot of kids!”

Chafouleas and Emily Wicks, a manager of operations and collections at the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry at UConn, devised the Feel Your Best Self program together during the pandemic.

Using videos that depict three puppet friends, Feel Your Best Self offers coping strategies, helps children understand their emotions, and fosters connections with others. Unlike some of the other 85 programs on the market, Feel Your Best Self is easy to use and aims for a relaxed, creative, and joyful learning experience. Chafouleas and Wicks also have evidence that students use the



// PICTURED: Emily Wicks, Gary Wolff, and Sandy Chafouleas pose with the \$25,000 check following the Wolff New Venture Competition. (Alex Syphers/Defining Studios)

strategies long after the lessons end.

Wicks says the demand for Feel Your Best Self has been incredible and the company will use the Wolff winnings to expand its printed materials, including books and supplementary materials for adults. They also want to expand their puppet-making kits for children.

Launched over a year ago, Feel Your Best Self has won a 2023 Kids Screen Award and four Telly Awards for TV and web content.

“Neither of us ever thought about creating a business. It truly grew from the public demand,” Chafouleas says. “Winning the Wolff award is surreal. It is a wonderful acknowledgement that what we are doing can be an important contributor to promoting emotional well-being for kids and their caregivers.”

The Wolff competition awarded almost \$60,000 in funds for UConn-affiliated startups. The event is the pinnacle entrepreneurship challenge at the School of Business, open to startups that have already competed and placed in previous challenges.

Jennifer Mathieu, executive director of the School’s Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation, which has mentored all six competitors this year, says it is exciting to watch entrepreneurs turn their dreams into reality.

“We live in such a fast-paced and ever-evolving world where we are teaching students skills for careers and industries that do not yet exist. I believe that the skills in entrepreneurship and leadership transcend any one point in time, any industry, any one business model, or team. These lessons are

important skills that support the individual not just in business, but in life,” she says.

“These six entrepreneurs have proven their desire to learn, have shown their resilience in the face of challenges, and have utilized the resources available to them to bring their idea into reality. It is not lost on me the role we have at CCEI to cultivate these skills and to inspire the next generation of innovators that will make the world a better place,” she adds.

Dean John A. Elliott says entrepreneurship is in the DNA of the School of Business. He thanked the Wolff family, who established the initial award, for its enduring dedication to entrepreneurship at UConn.

Elliott noted that the School is offering new and expanded entrepreneurship courses this year.



// PICTURED: The judges at the Wolff New Venture Competition. (Alex Syphers/Defining Studios)

The competition was judged by four highly qualified experts including: Laura Dinan Haber, innovation brand director at Nassau Re/Imagine; Casey Pickett, managing director of incubation at ClimateHaven; alumnus Pete Sena '05 (BUS), founder of Digital Surgeons; and Kwesi Quaye, partner at Fairview Capital.

6

STARTUPS  
ACCEPTED

\$57,500

PROVIDED IN  
VENTURE FUNDING

163+

AUDIENCE  
MEMBERS

Other event winners included:

**Swipestorm:** The Santander Second Place Prize; \$10,000 Award

**Andros:** The Prime Materials Recovery Third Place Prize; \$7,500 Award

**Mud Rat:** The Mark and Jamie Summers Innovation Award; \$5,000 Prize

**Puure:** The FML CPAs Audience Choice Award; \$5,000 Prize

**Particle-N:** The Baystate Financial Disruption Award; \$5,000 Prize

Professor Wayne Bragg, who serves as a mentor for the entrepreneurship programs, says the teams were all very different in their missions but similar in their exponential growth from May to October. He says their futures look promising.

“Sometimes you meet entrepreneurs who think they know it all,” he says. “These teams wanted to learn, which made it rewarding. I hope they all follow their passion and continue moving forward.”



“

I remember a presenter seeking me out to tell me of a previous graduate I should contact, because she could be helpful to me and my journey. I was so thankful, and that gesture was indicative of how the rest of my EBV experience progressed.

— SONIA E. ADDISON | FOUNDER, BOSSED UP BRAS



// PICTURED: Sonia E. Addison, Founder of Bossed Up Bras, at the 2023 EBV finale and awards ceremony.



# ENTREPRENEURSHIP BOOTCAMP FOR VETERANS

Cutting-edge, experiential entrepreneurship training for veterans.

The Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans (EBV) program at UConn continued to open the door to economic opportunity for veterans by developing their competencies in the steps associated with creating and sustaining an entrepreneurial venture.

Through its online accelerator and in-person bootcamp, EBV offered experiential training in entrepreneurship and small business management. The program served nearly 270 veterans and military spouses across 15 years, many of whom are designated by the Veterans Administration (VA) with a service-connected disability.

The program provided a sustainable option for veterans to transition into the civilian workforce and create economic security for themselves and their families. The network and comradery that formed within and across cohorts has been a lifeline for some. We are proud of the outcomes that have become a

central part of CCEI's story throughout the past 15 years.

This year, a summer cohort of 16 entrepreneurs embarked on a nine-day residency, which included various workshops and courses taught by UConn faculty, alongside special guest lectures from entrepreneurs and business executives.

Our 2023 cohort received a generous gift from Synchrony Financial, a long-standing donor and supporter of EBV. They provided a full morning of instruction with experts from around the country and a session led by Executive Vice President & CFO Brian Wenzel, where he revealed Synchrony's donation of Dell laptops for the veterans' business ventures.

CCEI introduced several new additions to the veterans initiative portfolio, including the alumni-focused webinar series titled 'Beyond the Uniform.' This series offered program

alumni the chance to gain insights from business experts, as well as each other. The EBV Newsletter was added in the spring of 2024 to highlight upcoming events, past EBV participants, and provide resources for veteran businesses in a quarterly email. It continues to remain a priority to engage EBV program alumni by adding additional services to the program.

The EBV program is proudly supported by hundreds of other organizations and individuals that continue to give year after year. Their donations allow the program to flourish by creating a sustainable funding source to support veteran entrepreneurs in Connecticut and beyond. This funding also allows the creation of new initiatives to support program alumni and fill needs in the pipeline of building and launching new businesses.

45

MENTORS ENGAGED

16

ENTREPRENEURS ACCELERATED

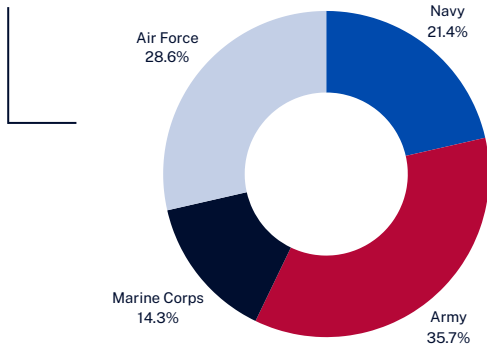
130

CLASSROOM HOURS

269

VETERANS & MILITARY SPOUSES SUPPORTED (SINCE 2010)

2023 EBV Cohort  
U.S. Service Breakout



// PICTURED (clockwise from left): The 2023 EBV cohort alongside Program Manager Nicholas Martinelli (far left) at their finale and awards ceremony; David Murphy '96 (BUS), cohort member Shaun Redden, cohort member Pedro Melendez Matos, and Lisa Murphy; cohort member JayR McIntyre and CCEI Advisory Board member Jon Russo '89 (BUS) shaking hands.





## UConn FAMILY BUSINESS PROGRAM

This year, five panels and workshops were hosted by UConn's Family Business Program — allowing for family businesses to share challenges, solutions, and learn from each other through an expansive network.

Quarterly, collaborative events were sponsored by a combination of organizations that support the ecosystem and family businesses themselves, including: Connecticut Wealth Management, Hinckley Allen, Lox Stock & Bagels, Omar Coffee, and UBS Private Wealth Management.

CCEI kicked off the year at Omar Coffee in Newington, CT. The event was filled with networking, a facility tour, and celebrating one of our region's family businesses. Attendees were also treated to breakfast, sponsored by Lox Stock & Bagels, and an overview from UBS Private Wealth Management about the importance of business owners addressing key strategies to monetize their life's work.



// PICTURED: Westminster Tool receiving their Family Business Award from Rory McGloin (far right). (Contributed Photo)

The spring edition of our virtual Legal Lunches series, sponsored by Hinckley Allen, focused on a new rule known as 'Beneficial Ownership Information Reporting,' which went into effect January 1, 2024. Over 50 individuals in our network attended the session to learn more and ask questions.

The Family Business Program was proud to continue our sponsorship of the annual Hartford Business Journal Family Business Awards in June. CCEI's Rory McGloin assisted in presentations to awardees including: Lyman Orchards, Niro Facilities Management, and Westminster Tool.

## BUILD HARTFORD COURSE

This academic year, our BUILD Hartford course continued to make impact in building meaningful relationships between Hartford's business ecosystem and our undergraduate and graduate student populations.

In the spring, the course underwent a pedagogical transformation led by Professor Rory McGloin. Our center worked to revise the course's key learning objectives, placing a greater emphasis on outcomes related to business communication and digital content creation.

The course now provides students a hands-on opportunity to engage the past, present, and future of Hartford's business ecosystem. Students were able to work with a wide range of individuals and organizations, adding to an applied, real-world learning experience.

Individual and organizational partnerships included:

Justin Morales | Fire by Forge  
Ben Dubow | Fire by Forge  
Alex Pilon '13 (CLAS) | Bloom Bake Shop  
Melissa Melonson '06 (CLAS) | Lumi Hospitality  
Jeff Devereux | Breakfast Lunch & Dinner  
Matt Sousa | Parkville Market

We are grateful for the continual support of UConn alumni Michael Cantor '80 (ENG) '83 (LAW) and Shari Cantor '81 (BUS) to make this course possible.

// PICTURED: The spring semester's students, alongside Professor McGloin and Program Coordinator Michaela Hartl, at the course's final presentations.



**I love being part of the solution. That's what drew me to this course. There is such a diverse community in Hartford that's not being amplified. We're the heart of Connecticut, and everybody needs to know that!**

— NISHA JOSHEE HARDNETT '24 (BUS) | BUILD HARTFORD STUDENT

## ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

We've packaged the best of our entrepreneurial programming to provide executives access to curated modules, allowing them to learn and develop the value of an entrepreneurial mindset delivered by our team of experts. These programs promise to provide a transcendent learning experience.

Within the last year, we have worked to prepare the launch of this program, held a pilot session, and recently secured our first official session. As we continue to learn and grow within the program, we are looking forward to playing a role in each program participants' journey to developing their entrepreneurial mindset.

// PICTURED: The Junior League of Hartford at their Entrepreneurial Leadership Program session (top); Beth Dineen during the session (bottom).





// PICTURED: Kylee Heyerdahl at an Entrepreneurial Leadership Program session.

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**Coming from a family of entrepreneurs, I wanted to learn more about the skillsets I have and things I can achieve – not only for myself, but to help my team. [The EMP is] a great tool [to use] to be able to learn what motivates my team, and how they can work better together.**

— KYLEE HEYERDAHL | ASSISTANT VP, MARKETING & COMMUNICATION, UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD







// PICTURED (from left to right): Student Ambassadors at a tabling event; students at CCEI's Startup Snackdown event; Student Ambassadors posing with gingerbread houses at a team-building event.

# STUDENT AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

**Empowered students empower students.**

This year, we have continued to work on one of our most impactful and far-reaching initiatives: our Student Ambassador Program. This program enlists undergraduate students as CCEI ambassadors to recruit their peers at UConn for participation in our diverse offerings.

The ambassadors engage the student body through dynamic events, strategic use of social media platforms, and compelling in-class presentations. Characterized by their

innovation, drive, and leadership, Student Ambassadors are dedicated to fostering the development and expansion of CCEI's programs. They maintain weekly office hours to provide prospective participants with guidance and support.

This year, they took on the additional responsibility of planning, executing, and hosting a major recruitment event on campus. During the spring semester, the Student Ambassadors hosted "Startup Snackdown," a

lunch-and-learn event designed to ignite participants' entrepreneurial spirit. The event featured a series of competitions and activities, offering a platform for aspiring entrepreneurs to engage in mock investment pitches and develop business ideas addressing social, cultural, or environmental challenges.

The highlight of the event was a guest lecture from CCEI alum and Jaden Brodeur '20 (BUS), founder of Luma, who shared valuable insights into his entrepreneurial journey at UConn.

**\$27,000**

PROVIDED IN SCHOLARSHIP & INTERNSHIP FUNDING

**40+**

IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS

## CCEI Student Ambassadors

**Roy Carpenter '24**  
Undergraduate Student  
School of Business

**Julia Cirone '27**  
Undergraduate Student  
School of Business

**Kristina DeMichiel '25**  
Undergraduate Student  
School of Business;  
College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

**Jose Gonzalez '24**  
Undergraduate Student  
School of Business

**Michelle Guerard '23**  
Undergraduate Student  
School of Business

**Ayush Mehta '26**  
Undergraduate Student  
School of Business

**Joseph Roberts '24**  
Undergraduate Student  
School of Business

## Student Administrative Assistants

**Sean Joseph '24**  
Undergraduate Student  
College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

**I believe CCEI is actively changing the world for the better, one step at a time. I feel so lucky to simply be a part of something so beneficial and community-oriented.**

“

— ROY CARPENTER '24 (BUS) | CCEI STUDENT AMBASSADOR



# JULIA CIRONE '27

**Not only is Julia a CCEI Student Ambassador, but she's a founder as well.**

## Tell me about your college career so far.

I just finished freshman year. I went into UConn 'Undecided,' and then decided to declare 'Accounting' because I felt like I would have the most opportunities when I graduate. I'm a part of the Women In Business club at UConn, joined CCEI as a Student Ambassador, and became a Werth Innovator.

## How has your experience been working for CCEI?

My takeaway working with CCEI is that it's been great, and an invaluable experience. I really enjoy working with the other entrepreneurs and having conversations with them in the office. I like learning about what they're doing and getting different perspectives.

## Can you tell us about your business?

Rebalance is a community and clothing brand centered around the importance of finding balance between productivity and relaxation, and looking at life in a holistic way. I'm working on it full time this summer, and doing a complete rebrand. I have a new logo now, and I'm focusing on filming content and selling t-shirts through a print-on-demand website.

## What are your plans for this summer?

I was accepted into the Werth Innovator program and received a scholarship to work on my business this summer. I'm working on testing my designs and building out my social media through street style interviews.



# JOSEPH ROBERTS '24

**Joseph's passion for entrepreneurship led to exciting internship opportunities.**

## What kinds of entrepreneurial activities are you involved in?

I applied to Hillside Ventures and learned about the sourcing and diligence side of what an investment team looks like at a venture capital firm. I've also interned for Connecticut Innovations as a Venture Analyst; and Loeb.nyc on the portfolio-management side. Now, I'm at General Catalyst, interning in investor relations and being the liaison between the investment team and our partners.

## How has your experience been working for CCEI?

It's been a great time. I've learned a lot from the team. Words can't say how much it's helped me get hands-on experience with the startups. During Get Seeded, I would help the startups do mock demos, help fix their pitch decks, and help them improve the company overall.

## What are your plans for this summer?

I'm currently doing business operations for Vamos, a UConn alumni startup, who has been accepted to participate in the 2024 Summer Fellowship Accelerator. Specifically, I'm getting into the nitty gritty of the financial modeling and projecting out the next five years. I'm also developing the go-to-market strategy, and finding ways to partner with more dominant travel agencies to get this product into the hands of our customers. I can't wait to see what's to come from them in the next couple of months.



## What inspired you to dabble in the field of entrepreneurship?

For one: it's building up companies that are transforming and innovating. Finding those individuals who are responsible behind their innovation is key and paramount on how I view entrepreneurs. Also, the equity involved in the field, and everyone's voices being heard. A lot of marginalized groups don't get to partake in venture capital, so I look at VC firms who are seeing where true alpha is within these companies.



# UNLOCKING ENTREPRENEURIAL POTENTIAL AT THE COLLABORATORY

Where entrepreneurship meets communication excellence.

By Kate Savinelli

Nestled within the vibrant ecosystem of CCEI, The Collaboratory is a beacon for aspiring entrepreneurs and innovators. This state-of-the-art media production studio, located in UConn's Graduate Business Learning Center, offers a dynamic space where creativity and business acumen converge. Entrepreneurs and innovators are empowered with content production tools, customized coaching, and access to a robust entrepreneurial community.

The Collaboratory's mission is clear: to foster communication, collaboration, and innovation. By providing entrepreneurs with the resources they need to effectively tell their stories and share their ideas, The Collaboratory helps bridge the gap between vision and execution. From recording podcasts to producing high-quality video content, this facility is equipped to support a wide range of media projects, ensuring that every entrepreneur can effectively reach their target audience.

A cornerstone of The Collaboratory's offerings is the 'Timely Topics' podcast series. Co-hosted by Dr. Rory McGloin and Jennifer Mathieu, this series delves into pressing issues and trends in the entrepreneurial world.

The first season of the podcast has featured an impressive lineup of guest speakers, including: Anthony Anthony, the State of Connecticut Chief Marketing Officer; Emmet Moore, founder of Jefferson Fry Company; renowned fine artist Andre Rochester; Bill Shufelt and John Walker, co-founders of Athletic Brewing Company; and venture capitalist Jessica Lynch.

Each episode provides listeners with insights into the minds of successful entrepreneurs and industry leaders, exploring themes such as branding, risk management, and the sources of inspiration that drive their work.

Through its comprehensive support and resources, The Collaboratory is committed to nurturing the next generation of entrepreneurs. By offering a platform for sharing knowledge and fostering connections, it helps turn entrepreneurial dreams into reality.

// PICTURED: Jude Yee (left) and Aaron Ram (right) in the studio space.



// PICTURED: Rory McGloin (left) and Jennifer Mathieu (right) filming a Timely Topics episode.

**TIMELY TOPICS**  
with Rory McGloin & Jen Mathieu



Want to listen in? Stream our latest episodes on Spotify and YouTube!

#### Production Team

**Alex Bridgemohan**  
PhD Student  
College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

**Emily Laput '26**  
Undergraduate Student  
School of Business; College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

**Aaron Ram '24**  
Undergraduate Student  
School of Fine Arts

**Jude Yee '24**  
Undergraduate Student  
School of Business; College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

## Our interview with Athletic Brewing Company —

**Q: Tell us how Athletic Brewing Co. got started.**

A: I wanted to be fit, eat healthy, perform well at work, have mindful relationships, and be a great parent. I also wanted to be very social: go to a lot of dinners, a lot of bars, restaurants, barbecues, weddings, special parties. I couldn't have all that in the current framework of the adult beverage world — it hadn't really adapted for the modern, busy, performance-oriented lifestyle.

Why can I not have great beverages that were as good as the alcoholic beverages, without the functional ingredient of alcohol?

And so the idea was to reinvent the way modern adults drink, and bring more people into the beer category. We just want to bring options into the world.



// PICTURED (from left to right): Bill Shufelt, John Walker, and Jennifer Mathieu in The Collaboratory studio.

**Q: Can you give us an idea of the landscape as you were getting started? What did the non-alcoholic beer category look like?**

A: The category honestly did not look that different than it had during Prohibition. It wasn't marketed as something that was aspirational, positive, and equivalent to alcohol — and we saw a huge opportunity to make product quality without any drop off.

The market was super sleepy. It wasn't talked about or discussed in the industry. But every survey I did in business planning said that upwards of 55% of adults said they would drink great, non-alcoholic beer with some frequency. There was a huge difference between industry and consumer needs. And we stepped into that.

**Q: The theme of this episode is 'success.' How do you personally define success? What has been your biggest success as a founder?**

A: We really try to hit pause and focus on the good things happening: taking the wins,

sharing them with the team, and celebrating as a team.

There's a number of metrics [we define as success]. I think it's the positive impact we're having on the world: giving people moderate options, including a lot of people in great social experiences that enjoyment in life.

I think it's being a great employer: a big thing for [us] is giving people great and challenging careers. They're excited to tell their friends and family about it, it fulfills them, and being a long-term employer is a big thing to us. We employ well over 100 people in the state of Connecticut.

It's a mix of that impact on the world, and being really proud of the company we're building.

**Q: What's next for Athletic Brewing Co.?**

A: We're still doing a lot of innovation in terms of styles, brews, and quality. Different formats, different flavors. We're always experimenting on our pilot systems on both coasts.

Obviously, we spend a lot of time in the manufacturing space trying to build out capacity and learn about new, innovative ways to become more sustainable as we produce and grow — and do it responsibly.

We've done some really fun, recent 'collaboration beers' like teaming up with Walker Hayes, the country music star, to release a classic ale: "Fancy Like." The second release of that is coming in the coming weeks.

As a brand, we've just doing more of what we've been doing. We recently cracked into the [top ten of all craft brewers](#) in the country. When we started, we were the smallest of 8,000 craft brewers in the country. There's now 10,000 craft brewers in the country.

We are thinking bigger — we want to be an exciting growth area for the beer category in the future in a healthy, positive way, and bring a lot of people into the craft beer community. Non-alcoholic craft beer is one of the most exciting ways to bring people into that category.

Listen to the full episode: [bit.ly/timely-topics-ep4](https://bit.ly/timely-topics-ep4)

Learn more about Athletic Brewing Co.: [athleticbrewing.com](https://athleticbrewing.com)



ciency  
ant revenue loss

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**Before CCEI, I struggled to articulate my business and my story in a clear and compelling way. Continuous pitching, feedback, and iteration turned my weakness into a strength.**

— NATHAN CATAPANO '24 (CLAS) | FOUNDER & CEO, SWIPESTORM

// PICTURED: Nathan Catapano '24 (CLAS), founder of Swipestorm, pitching at the 2023 Wolff New Venture Competition.





# CONFERENCE ENGAGEMENTS

## Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers

October marked a pivotal month for CCEI as we attended and participated in the 27th annual Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers (GCEC) conference.

Held at the University of Texas at Dallas, the conference featured an array of sessions and networking opportunities, serving as a melting pot of ideas, strategies, and insights.

With over 600 university entrepreneurship leaders from 300 universities in 19 countries, this was the largest conference in GCEC's history. Notably, UConn was recognized as a "Gold" Leadership Circle school.

Our center made an impact by leading three impactful sessions:

### Utilizing The Entrepreneurial Mindset Profile To Help Develop Start-Up Teams & Promote Individual Growth Related To Accelerator Participation

In this session, Jennifer Mathieu and Dr. Rory McGloin delved into the applications of the Entrepreneurial Mindset Profile (EMP) and provided insights on fostering growth and optimizing startup teams for success in accelerator programs.

### From Influence To Impact: A Case Study on Content Creation As A Marketing Tool

Alycia Chrosniak and Kate Savinelli explored the power of content creation as a marketing tool for

entrepreneurship centers through a compelling breakdown of individual personas and strategic video content.

### Developing The Next Generation: Implementing A Student Ambassador Program Within Your Entrepreneurship Center

Michaela Hartl and Rachel Ayers shared their experience developing the next generation of entrepreneurial leaders through a Student Ambassador Program, providing information on establishing and maintaining a program through mentorship and community.

The conference also featured activities designed to foster connections among attendees. We visited various locations, including: Community Beer Company, The Star in Frisco, a pop-up event at a Kendra Scott store hosted by their Women in Entrepreneurial Leadership Institute, and The Perot Museum of Nature and Science.

The experience was transformative for our center, not only showcasing our commitment to entrepreneurship, but providing a platform for collaboration with other entrepreneurship centers to shape the ecosystem's future.

// PICTURED: CCEI team members posed at the GCEC awards ceremony (top); Jennifer Mathieu and Dr. McGloin pointing to their session (left); Rachel Ayers and Kate Savinelli at a tabling showcase (right); Michaela Hartl and Rachel Ayers presenting their session (bottom).



## SXSW

Members of the CCEI team attended the annual South by Southwest (SXSW) conference in Austin, Texas in March. SXSW serves as an assemblage of creativity and innovation, drawing participants from various fields to collaborate and experience the latest in technology, entrepreneurship, and culture. The team was inspired by talks, including a keynote with Sue Bird '02 (CLAS) about the importance of leveraging women's sports.



// PICTURED: Sue Bird '02 (CLAS), former UConn women's basketball player, celebrated WNBA player, Olympic gold medalist, and founder of Togethrx.

## Association for Business Communication

In October, Dr. Rory McGloin and Alex Bridgemohan presented "Communicating Organizational Vision: Learn How to Apply the Jim Collin's 'Good to Great' Vision Method for Extracting and Defining an Organization's Vision" in Denver, Colorado.

## Yale Innovation Summit

Yale Ventures hosted the tenth annual Yale Innovation Summit, which convenes the innovation and entrepreneurship community in conversations, networking, and pitch competition across five tracks of programming. Ten UConn alumni and student startups pitched and e-postered during the summit, including: Encapsulate, Veradermics, Andros, Mud Rat, Torigen, Inc., Genesisit, AnaBio, Bastion Health, Webquity, and The Key Bookstore.

## National Innovation Network

The NSF I-Corps National Innovation Network (NIN) held its seventh annual convening in Washington, D.C. in June. The goal of this network is to bring together leaders in university-based innovation that support the NSF I-Corps programming. The focus of the conference this year was on collaboration across the ten NSF I-Corps Hubs, and expanding training opportunities.



# TRANSFORMING TOMORROW

Pioneering events led by Launc[H] showcase Connecticut's leadership in quantum technologies and artificial intelligence.

## Imagining A Quantum Future

In December, Launc[H] spearheaded an event that convened 150 academic, government, and industry leaders to discuss the transformative potential of quantum technologies, and their impact on Connecticut's economy.

The event aimed to bolster awareness and engagement with QuantumCT, a public-private partnership led by UConn and Yale University. QuantumCT is dedicated to establishing Connecticut as a premier hub for quantum technologies, including: quantum sensing, cryptography, materials, computing, and algorithms.

The event featured opening remarks from several distinguished leaders, who highlighted the potential economic impact of quantum technologies and the importance of Connecticut's leadership in this field:

- Radenka Maric** | President, UConn
- Rajeeb Hazra** | CEO, Quantinuum
- Michael Crair** | Vice Provost for Research, Yale University
- Pamir Alpay** | VP of Research, Innovation & Entrepreneurship, UConn
- Dan O'Keefe** | Commissioner-Designate, Department of Economic & Community Development
- Luke Bronin** | Mayor of Hartford
- David Souder** | Senior Associate Dean, UConn School of Business
- Ali Sayir** | Program Manager, Air Force Office of Scientific Research



// PICTURED: Nadine Van Son leading a session at the Imagining A Quantum Future event. (Defining Studios)



// PICTURED: Pete Sena '05 (BUS), Founder of Digital Surgeons & CCEI Advisory Board member, presenting a keynote speech. (Defining Studios)

Following the keynote addresses, four industry-specific breakout sessions were held to educate stakeholders about the capabilities of quantum technologies and strategies for leveraging them for competitive advantage. Session leaders ranged from consultants, professors, engineers, and industry directors. The session topics included:

### Quantum Applications in Insurance & Financial Services

### Skillsets Required in a Quantum Workforce

### Quantum Materials & The Future of Manufacturing

### Quantum Applications in Health

The forum facilitated the development and solidification of crucial industry and academic partnerships, expanding the essential support base to position Connecticut as a globally recognized leader in quantum technologies.

## Hartford AI Day

The third annual Hartford AI Day, organized by Launc[H] and supported by sponsors such as Capgemini, the UConn School of Business, Insurity, Hartford HealthCare, Otis Elevator, Slalom, Insperity, and Aureus Analytics, took place in March.

The event attracted 370 students, local professionals, and members of Connecticut's startup community to the Graduate Business Learning Center in downtown Hartford.

The event aimed to foster discussions about AI's impact on daily life and work within Connecticut's innovation community, and enhance fluency and skills in the rapidly evolving field of AI. It also celebrated the use of AI in problem-solving by industry leaders and startups, engaging new talent in the field by connecting them with local employers.

It featured 32 speakers participating in 23

sessions across three tracks, which included:

### Skill-Building in AI AI-Powered Startups Doing Business with AI

CCEI hosted the "AI-Powered Startups" track, featuring presentations from seven Connecticut-based startups pioneering AI advancements. The Digital Frontiers program anchored the "AI Skill-Building" track, offering five unique sessions led by both faculty and students.

"We designed Hartford AI Day to create an environment for learning, strengthening our community, and for inspiration," said Michelle Cote, director at Launc[H] and one of the event organizers. "This year we saw the energy from everyone involved reach a whole new scale. It was remarkable to witness peer-to-peer mentorship, exchange of insights, and collaboration percolate throughout the day."



// PICTURED: AI Day attendees seated during a session. (Defining Studios)

Notable speakers included: Pete Sena '05 (BUS), Jared Kosky '02 (CLAS), Ezhil Nanjappan, Rajesh Iyer, Dan O'Keefe, and Paul Drennan.

AI Day successfully brought together a diverse group of participants, fostering an environment of learning and collaboration, further cementing Connecticut's position as a leader in AI innovation.



# MEET OUR TEAM

OUR **PEOPLE** DRIVE OUR **PASSION** FOR INNOVATION.



**Jennifer Mathieu**  
Executive Director



**Rory McGloin**  
Associate Director of  
Entrepreneurial Communication  
& Research



**Alycia Chrosniak**  
Assistant Director of Brand &  
Venture Development



**Nicholas Martinelli**  
Program Manager



**Rachel Borden**  
Business Operations  
Manager



**Mehgan Williams**  
Program Coordinator



**Michaela Hartl**  
Engagement & Outreach  
Coordinator



**Kate Savinelli**  
Marketing & Database  
Assistant



**Michelle Cote**  
Lead Instructor;  
Director of Launc[H]



**Rachel Ayers**  
Business Operations  
Assistant

## ACCOLADES & ACHIEVEMENTS

**JENNIFER MATHIEU** — HARTFORD BUSINESS JOURNAL'S  
2024 'TOP 25 WOMEN IN BUSINESS' AWARD HONOREE

**RORY MCGLOIN** — HARTFORD BUSINESS JOURNAL'S 2023  
'40 UNDER FORTY' AWARD HONOREE





## AFFILIATED FACULTY ▶

**Alexander Aksenov Ph.D.**, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences  
**George Bollas Ph.D.**, College of Engineering  
**Qing Cao Ph.D.**, School of Business  
**Sandra Chafouleas Ph.D.**, Neag School of Education  
**Longtu Chen Ph.D.**, College of Engineering  
**Ryan Coles Ph.D.**, School of Business  
**Ryan Cooper Ph.D.**, College of Engineering  
**Leila Daneshmadni Ph.D.**, School of Engineering  
**Caroline Dealy Ph.D.**, School of Dental Medicine; School of Medicine  
**Mihai Duduta Ph.D.**, College of Engineering  
**Jennifer Eigo Ph.D.**, School of Business  
**Bin Feng Ph.D.**, College of Engineering  
**Timothy Folta Ph.D.**, School of Business  
**Sami Ghaddar Ph.D.**, School of Business  
**Travis Grosser Ph.D.**, School of Business  
**Wes Hamrick Ph.D.**, Greenhouse Studios  
**Tiffany Kelly Ph.D.**, School of Nursing  
**Yusuf Khan Ph.D.**, School of Medicine  
**Yu Lei Ph.D.**, College of Engineering

**Nora Madjar Ph.D.**, School of Business  
**Redona Methasani Ph.D.**, School of Business  
**Lakshmi Nair Ph.D.**, UConn Health  
**David Noble Ph.D.**, School of Business, Werth Institute  
**Keith Pennington Ph.D.**, School of Business  
**Linda Pescatello Ph.D.**, College of Agriculture, Health & Natural Resources  
**Gary Powell Ph.D.**, School of Business  
**Mingyu Qiao Ph.D.**, College of Agriculture, Health & Natural Resources  
**Evan Rawley Ph.D.**, School of Business  
**Christina Ross Ph.D.**, School of Nursing  
**Amit Savkar Ph.D.**, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences  
**Tom Scheinfeldt Ph.D.**, School of Fine Arts; Greenhouse Studios  
**Lawrence Silbart Ph.D.**, College of Agriculture, Health & Natural Resources  
**David Souder Ph.D.**, School of Business  
**Ali Tamayol Ph.D.**, College of Engineering  
**Xiuchun Tian Ph.D.**, College of Agriculture, Health & Natural Resources  
**Xiusheng Yang Ph.D.**, College of Agriculture, Health & Natural Resources  
**Shaopeng Zhang Ph.D.**, College of Engineering  
**Ting Zhou Ph.D.**, School of Fine Arts

## ADVISORY BOARD ▶

**Shay Cantner '16** (NEAG), CEO & Founder, *Elea*  
**Ryan Gresh '09** (ENG), CEO & Founder, *The Feel Good Lab*  
**Nova Lorraine '95 '97** (CLAS), Founder, *Raine Magazine*  
**Jon Russo '89** (BUS), CMO & Founder, *B2B Fusion*  
**Pete Sena '05** (BUS), Founder, *Digital Surgeons*  
**Sam Simons '95** (BUS), President & COO, *OEM Controls*  
**Charlene Walters '92** (CLAS), Business Mentor, Consultant, Author  
**Gary Wolff**, President, *Wolff Wealth Advisors*  
**Greg Wolff '75** (BUS), Financial Planner, *Wolff Financial Group*  
**Asim Zaheer '90** (BUS), Serial Entrepreneur & CMO, *Glassbox*

## PROGRAM INSTRUCTORS ▶

**Wayne Bragg**, Instructor, Summer Fellowship  
**Matt Connell**, Instructor, BUILD Hartford  
**John Hoffert**, Instructor, Accelerate UConn  
**Leland Holcomb**, Instructor, Traction & Accelerate UConn  
**Claire Zick**, Pod Mentor, Accelerate UConn



# TRANSFORMING URBAN & GLOBAL AGRICULTURE THROUGH COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Summer Fellowship Accelerator alum Levo International expands internationally, and has no plans on slowing down.

By Kate Savinelli



// PICTURED: Christian Heiden '21 (CAHNR) showing a hydroponic system to volunteers (Contributed Photo).

Levo International, founded by Christian Heiden '21 (CAHNR), is a social enterprise with a mission to empower people to end poverty through partnership and innovation. Heiden, who began the venture in high school, has seen the organization evolve from a Boy Scouts project into a transformative force in urban agriculture.

Heiden's journey began with a simple project aimed at building a hydroponic greenhouse in Haiti. This ignited a vision for leveraging hydroponic technology to make a global impact.

"It was on the plane ride back in 2016 when [I] realized this technology could have international impact," Heiden recalls.

Hydroponics, a method of growing plants using only water and fertilizer, is at the heart of Levo International's approach. Traditional hydroponic

systems are often expensive and complex, requiring sophisticated technology and equipment. Levo International has simplified the process, making it both accessible and affordable.

"You end up with a system that saves up to 90% of the water, and uses about a quarter of the space."

This innovation, which was one of ten startups in CCEI's Summer Fellowship Accelerator in 2019, has enabled the transformation of vacant urban lots – particularly in Hartford, Connecticut – into productive hydroponic farms.

"We can take a vacant lot that can't be used without millions of dollars for remediation and grow thousands of pounds of produce," says Heiden. The organization is on track to be the largest urban farming operation in Hartford, producing about 50,000 pounds – over twice the weight of a school bus – of produce this year, up from 15,000 pounds last year.

"We could actually take Hartford from a food desert to a net exporter of produce, [while] creating lots of employment opportunities."

But Levo International's impact extends far beyond Hartford.

The organization has ongoing projects in Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, and Puerto Rico, focusing on food security and community education. In Haiti, they have distributed hydroponic systems to 400 households, achieving a 94% success rate in vegetable harvesting in the first year. Levo International also supports a handful of schools in Haiti with school meal programs by using hydroponics they've scaled up.



// PICTURED: A volunteer posed next to a hydroponic system in Haiti (Contributed Photo).

In Puerto Rico, Levo International is expanding their pilot program by running service trips during the fall and winter of this year, with one local high school already signed on. These worldwide programs demonstrate the scalability and adaptability of Levo's simplified hydroponic technology.

Levo International collaborates with various partners, including hospitals, churches, and food pantries. Notably, they have established hydroponic farms on hospital rooftops, a pioneering initiative in the Northeast United States.

"I believe these are the only hydroponic rooftop farms on hospitals in the northeast, and potentially in the entire United States," Heiden notes. Levo International's partnerships with Hartford Healthcare, Windham Hospital, and Charlotte Hungerford Hospital highlight the potential of hydroponics to contribute to the 'food is medicine' movement, providing fresh produce to hospital patients and staff. Hospital staff also have the option to volunteer, promoting community ties.

Looking ahead, they aim to expand the urban farming footprint in Hartford in 2025 and increase food access initiatives. They also plan to grow their international programming, with new projects in Uganda, and continued efforts in Jamaica and Mexico.

Levo International's team has grown from three members in 2021 to 32 employees today. This diverse team includes administrative staff, farming managers, hydroponic technicians, and an installation team.

Most notably, perhaps, is their research team, who is working on creating an organic hydroponic fertilizer made from compost waste products. If successful, this fertilizer would be the first of its kind, increasing opportunity in countries like Haiti where fertilizer is not readily available.

"[Our team handles] all sorts of different things ... our largest operation is [within] farming, and the second is the installation team," Heiden explains.



// PICTURED: A hydroponic rooftop system (Contributed Photo).

Levo International published its first research publication this year on the complexity – or lack thereof – of agri-phonics.

"What usually happens in hydroponics is you're constantly circulating the water, which requires a constant flow of electricity. But, our research demonstrated you can drastically reduce the power requirement needed to circulate the systems without having any impact on yield. We put empirical evidence behind what we were seeing in Haiti – where people circulate water by hand."

Through technology, partnerships, and a dedicated team, Levo International is poised to continue transforming urban and global agriculture, setting new standards in sustainable farming.

To learn more about Levo International, visit [levointernational.org](https://levointernational.org).

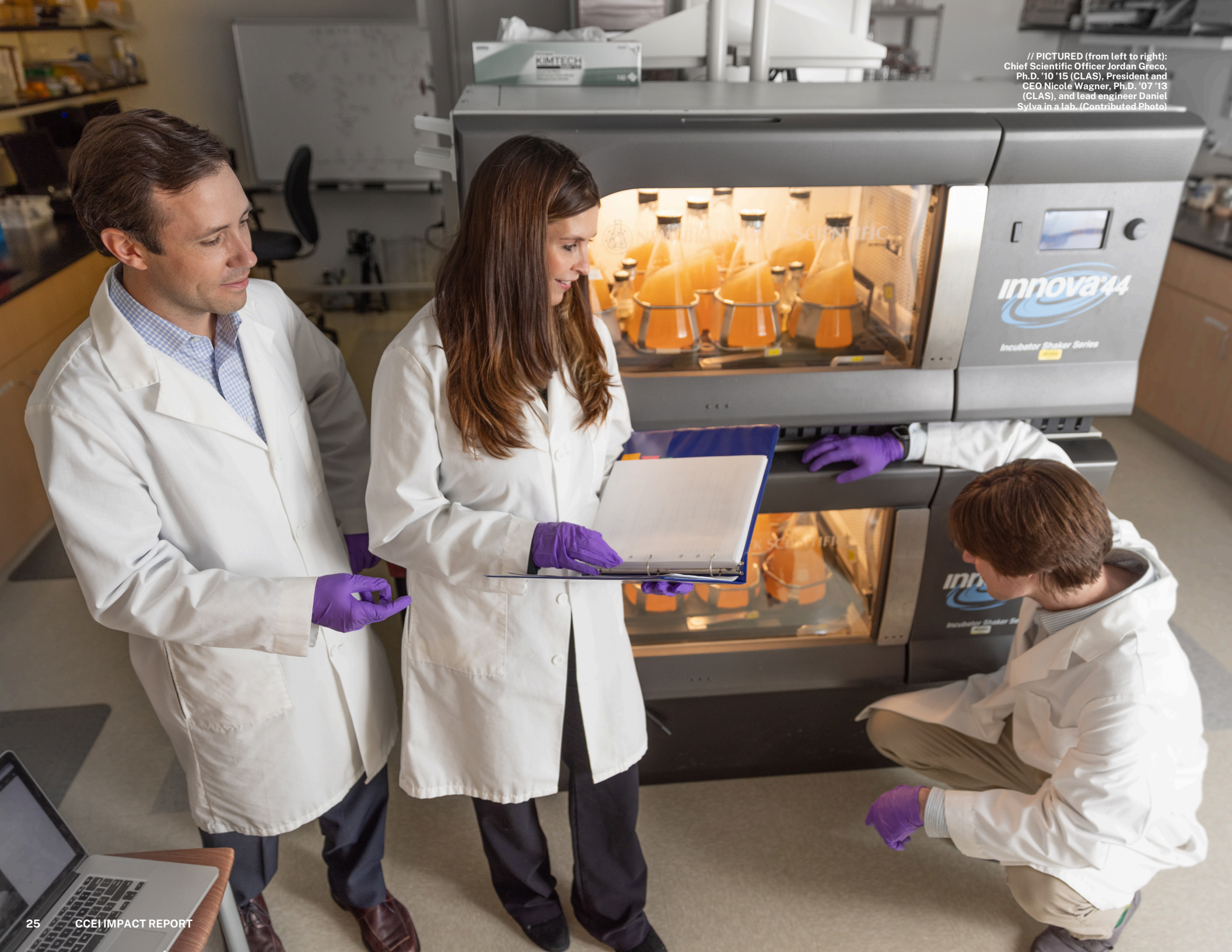


// PICTURED: Christian Heiden '21 (CAHNR) leading a tour of his micro-farm in Hartford. (Jaclyn Severance/UConn Photo)





// PICTURED (from left to right):  
Chief Scientific Officer Jordan Greco,  
Ph.D. '10 '15 (CLAS), President and  
CEO Nicole Wagner, Ph.D. '07 '13  
(CLAS), and lead engineer Daniel  
Sylva in a lab. (Contributed Photo)





# PIONEERING VISION RESTORATION

From UConn labs to the stars, LambdaVision's retina technology journey is one of resilience and inspiration.

By Kate Savinelli

LambdaVision, a trailblazing startup originating from UConn in 2009, has set its sights on a transformative mission: developing a protein-based artificial retina to restore vision to patients suffering from end-stage retinal degenerative diseases.

Led by President and CEO Nicole Wagner '07 '13 (CLAS), the company's innovative approach addresses conditions like retinitis pigmentosa — an orphan disease affecting approximately 100,000 individuals in the U.S. and a million globally — and age-related macular degeneration, which impacts over 50 million people worldwide.

The genesis of LambdaVision lies in Wagner's graduate thesis work, conducted under the mentorship of Dr. Robert Birge, a distinguished professor in chemistry at UConn, and alongside Dr. Jordan Greco '10 '15 (CLAS), a fellow graduate student turned Chief Scientific Officer.

"Dr. Greco and I eventually moved the technology out of UConn's research labs and into the Technology Incubator Program in Farmington, Connecticut," Wagner recalls.

Their journey has been bolstered by various

programs and resources within Connecticut, and Wagner cannot overstate how valuable it was early-on to participate in different Connecticut-based programs. Early support from UConn and the Technology Incubator Program, along with funding from Connecticut Innovations and participation in programs like CCEI's Summer Fellowship Accelerator, ABCT, and MassChallenge have been pivotal in the company's growth.

"Every little piece of funding in the very beginning helps. You have to be as resourceful as possible."

To date, LambdaVision has raised about \$17 million in funding, a combination of non-dilutive funding from sources such as the National Science Foundation, the National Eye Institute, and NASA, along with additional seed capital. This financial support has been instrumental in advancing their technology towards commercialization.

One of LambdaVision's unique and most notable achievements is its collaboration with NASA. To date the company has flown nine missions with the International Space Station (ISS), working to

manufacture their artificial retina in microgravity. With support from The Center for the Advancement of Science in Space, and Space Tango — an industry leader in pursuing health and technology manufacturing in microgravity — Wagner notes how surreal the entire process with NASA has been.

"It was a bucket list item that I didn't know was on my bucket list. [During one launch], we [got] to see the rockets from a private location in the Kennedy Space Center and could feel the vibrations of the launch. There were astronauts, administrators, and leadership all in the same room [with us]."

With continued funding from NASA, they intend to fly additional ISS flights in the coming years. The benefits of conducting this process in space are significant and more precise for the product itself.

"We manufacture artificial retina through a process called electrostatic layer-by-layer deposition, which means we have a scaffold we float on the surface of a solution. In a microgravity environment, we get a much more even coating. We don't have to deal with things like sedimentation, evaporation, surface tension, and convection, leading to a better-quality product."

Looking ahead, LambdaVision is preparing to relocate to a new 4,000-4,500 square-foot facility in New Haven, Connecticut — a move that will enable further expansion with the hope to get artificial retina into patients as soon as possible. The company is set to make additional hires, expanding their team of six full-time hires to support GMP production of their protein and additional preclinical studies.

"There are very few people doing ophthalmology and space research at the same time. We have a great team that we've built slow-and-steady that's willing to roll up their sleeves and learn new things. Our team is a big part of how we got to where we are now."



// PICTURED: Nicole Wagner, Ph.D. '07 '13 (CLAS), posed with her Women in Aerospace 'Outstanding Achievement Award' plaque (Contributed Photo).

Reflecting on LambdaVision's journey, Wagner acknowledges the challenges and resilience required to bring their vision to life.

"We're a company that was founded in 2009 — and now it's 2024. It [took] a lot of grit, tenacity, and resilience. I can't tell you how many times we faced challenges and thought: 'Are we going to make it?' But it's really about not giving up and continuing to knock on doors."

With recent accomplishments such as being awarded the NASA Exceptional Technology Achievement Medal and securing a fourth patent in June of this year, LambdaVision is only continuing its growth and success.

"You've got to ride the wave and keep the momentum going, because you don't know when it's going to sizzle again."

Wagner's journey with LambdaVision is a testament to the power of innovation, collaboration, and unwavering determination. As the company continues to push the boundaries of science and technology, it stands poised to make an impact on the lives of millions, bringing the hope of restored vision closer to reality.

To learn more about LambdaVision, visit [lambdavis.com](https://lambdavis.com).



// PICTURED: LambdaVision's partnership with Space Tango and its work with the ISS has allowed for a successful validation of a microgravity manufacturing method (pictured above) for producing artificial retina. (Contributed Photo).



# INNOVATING INDEPENDENCE ONE TOILET AT A TIME

**After three years, nine product iterations, and over a million dollars raised in funding, SedMed has brought its toilet lift to market.**

**By Kate Savinelli**

In the heart of Woodbridge, Connecticut, a startup is making significant strides in enhancing the quality of life for older adults and people with disabilities.

SedMed Inc., founded by Jeremy Bronen '20 (ENG), specializes in toilet-lift assist technology, providing a medical-equipment solution that helps individuals maintain their independence while reducing the risk of injuries for both users and healthcare staff.

Bronen's journey began during his time at UConn, where he graduated with a Mechanical Engineering degree. Bronen's senior capstone project was inspired by his project sponsor, who was living with a close family friend they affectionately called 'Grandma Grace' — who had suffered a stroke. Her story planted the seed for what would become SedMed.

"She became wheelchair-bound, and couldn't get around the house or use the toilet independently without pain or needing help to avoid the risk of a fall."

Recognizing the need for a solution, Bronen embraced the project with the support of CCEI's Summer Fellowship Accelerator in 2020.



**// PICTURED:**  
The Toilet Lift  
Assist device.  
(Via SedMed  
Website)

SedMed's 'Toilet Lift Assist' device is designed to help individuals with mobility challenges safely and easily use the toilet. It supports up to 80% of a user's weight, requires no electricity, and features a gas spring mechanism for controlled assistance.



**// PICTURED (from left to right):** Jeremy Bronen '20 (ENG), Matan Cutler, Noah Reyhl, and Kevin Mejia posed with Toilet Lift Assist units. (Contributed Photo)

It's suitable for users weighing up to 300 pounds, and fits most toilets simply by replacing the existing seat with two bolts.

"To use it, you just sit back against it. It slowly lowers you down, locks for safety, and when you're ready to get up, you unlock it and the SedMed gives a helpful boost off the toilet," says Bronen.

The company launched and started selling in March of 2023 after nine iterations of the product, with 100 units already deployed. When asked what sets SedMed's lift assist apart from competitors, Bronen says the product is the only self-powered toilet lifter that mounts onto any toilet.

One of SedMed's most notable achievements is an ongoing study with a prestigious hospital. Although the hospital information cannot be released due to ongoing surveys, the study evaluates the product's success based on clinical outcomes, staff safety, and efficiency improvements, such as reducing the need

for two-person assists to one — or none at all.

"The hospital had two staff injuries last year during toilet transfers, and now our toilet-lift assists are in 16 rooms, helping numerous patients," he explains.

SedMed's growth is mirrored by its expanding team. The company has a CFO, director of sales, project engineer, marketing associate, and engineering intern. "I'm very proud of our team; there have been times where it's been a real grind, but they have come together in a remarkable way. They are mission-aligned beyond just it being their profession — they love what we're doing."

SedMed's reach is also growing both geographically and demographically.

"We're all over the place geographically, but primarily on the East Coast and in the Midwest," Bronen says.

The company's primary targets are hospitals,

especially inpatient rehab and post-operative orthopedic and abdominal care units. This pivot from assisted living facilities to hospitals has proven even more successful, aligning with SedMed's mission to provide safer, more efficient solutions for patient care.

SedMed has raised \$1.7 million to date, with an additional \$135,000 received in grant funding. Bronen acknowledges the support from ecosystem collaborators like Connecticut Innovations, the Angel Investor Forum, and the Westchester Angel Group.

"Bo Bradstreet of Connecticut Innovations has been amazing for talent acquisition, and the Westchester Angel [Group] has done a lot [for our] connections," he shares. Bronen's networking skills have also played a crucial role, with 90 percent of SedMed's customers acquired through networking and trade shows.



**// PICTURED:** Jeremy Bronen (left) and Noah Reyhl (right) at a showcase. (Contributed Photo)

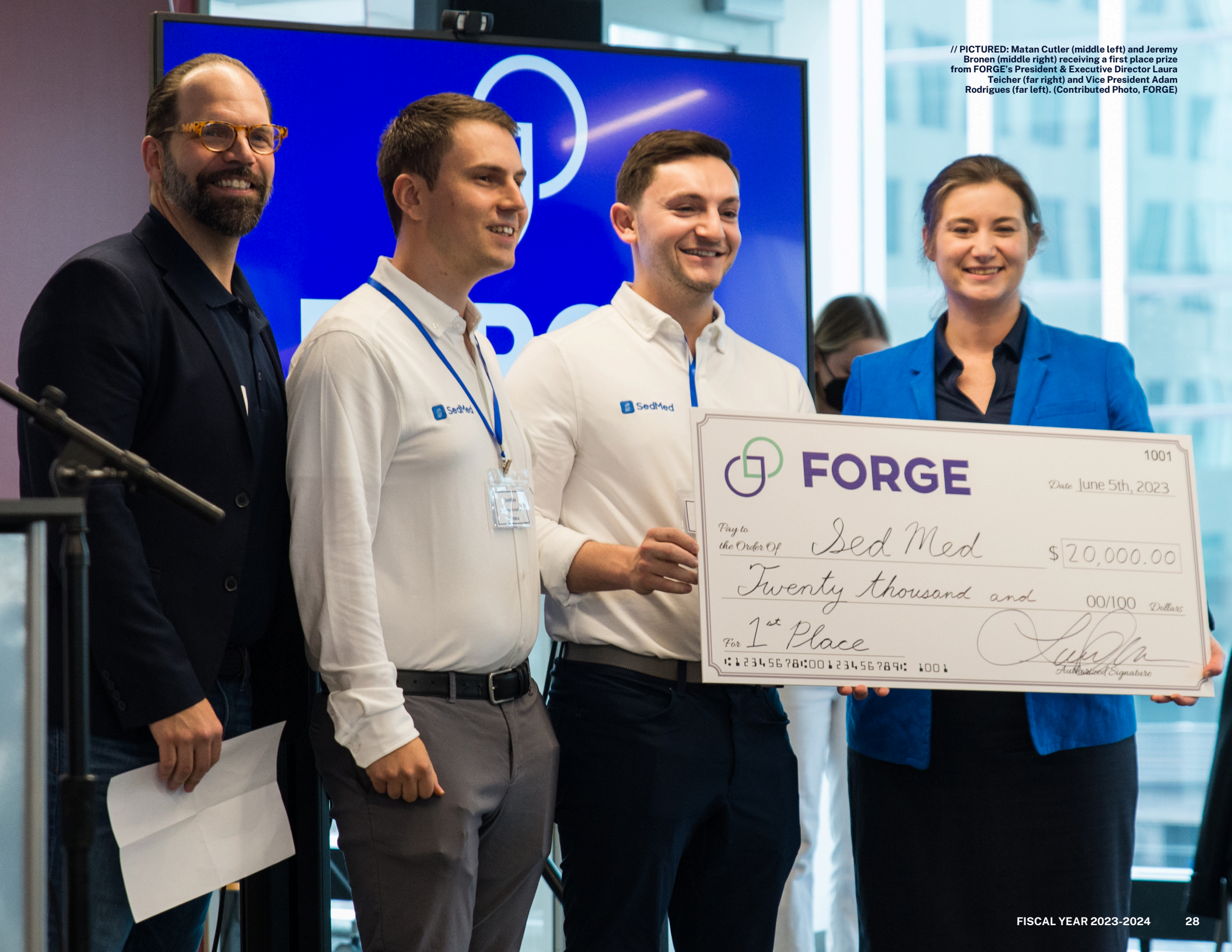
With a strong foundation and a clear mission, SedMed is poised for continued growth and impact. As Bronen spends half of his time on the road with customers — installing and training — he remains focused on advancing SedMed's mission.

"Trade show season is coming up, [and] with our focus on hospitals, [we see this being] great for the company." The company's commitment to innovation and improving patient care positions SedMed as a promising leader in the medical equipment industry.

To learn more about SedMed or purchase your own Toilet Lift Assist, visit [sed-med.com](https://sed-med.com).



// PICTURED: Matan Cutler (middle left) and Jeremy Bronen (middle right) receiving a first place prize from FORGE's President & Executive Director Laura Teicher (far right) and Vice President Adam Rodrigues (far left). (Contributed Photo, FORGE)





# ALUMNI UPDATES

**3D PenBone** was confirmed by the FDA for their 510(k) eligibility, and received FDA approval for their proposed plan of experiments.



**Andros** won \$30,000 at the MIT Climate & Energy Prize, \$6,000 at the 2024 Yale Innovation Summit (pictured above), and its founder, Laron Burrows '24 (ENG) was selected as a 2024 Activate Fellow.

**Atlantic Sea Solutions** was accepted into the NSF I-Corps National Program, receiving a customer discovery grant of \$50,000. They are in the process of closing a friends and family funding round.

**Bastion Health** has expanded their reach to 46 states, now covering 96% of the United States' population. They launched new services, including prostate, reproductive, hormonal, and sexual health components. There is now comprehensive services on STD/STI's, prostate and bladder cancers, colon screening, and UTI management. Their provider network grew to over 60 board-certified urologists and nurse practitioners, making Bastion Health the largest virtual urology network in the United States.

**Dual Language Connections** published their first book and launched their first online course, which will repeat 3-4 times per year.



**Encapsulate** won first place at the 2023 TiE Boston Women Pitch Competition (pictured above), and is expected to move on to represent TiE Boston at a global pitch competition in Singapore. They are conducting medical experiments using microgravity within the International Space Station (ISS) National Laboratory.



**Feel Your Best Self** won a Telly Award (logo pictured above) for the second year in a row. They have launched their storybook products, and are preparing to launch digital storybook downloads.



**Genesist** won a Golden Ticket award from BioLabs New Haven at the 2024 Yale Innovation Awards (pictured above), receiving one year of access to a dedicated laboratory bench at a BioLabs site. They were an Eli Lilly Grand Medicine Challenge finalist, and were selected by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to pitch on the NIH stage at the BIO International Convention in 2024.

**Kona Brand** secured their first wholesale account to a surf shop in Scituate, MA. They are projected to be in ten more surf shops by the end of 2024.

**Mud Rat** was accepted into the ClimateHaven Incubator Program, and was granted workshop space at Mystic Seaport in Mystic, CT.



**onewith** was featured in People Magazine's "The 34 Best One-Piece Swimsuits for Women of 2024" for their high-cut swimsuit (pictured above).

**Particle-N** won second place in the TiE Boston Global Pitch Competition, beating over 900 applicants.

**PatentPlusAI** closed a pre-seed round with lead investor Tim Draper.



**Phoenix Tailings** (pictured above) closed a sales contract for the next three years of production with a magnet manufacturer supplying global auto brands. They've successfully completed the commissioning of an optimized metallization cell configuration, and have doubled production capacity. The first shipment of this product was dispatched. They have successfully demonstrated rare-earth content recovery from a tailings site in Barton Hill, NY. They received a \$1.2 million dollar grant from M2I2 to support U.S.-based metal production.

**ProVelocityBat** sold to nearly every Major League Baseball organization this year. They have added softball and cricket products to their lineup, and have sold to roughly 30 countries worldwide.

**PUURE** won the Bridgeport Pitch Competition, receiving \$5,000. They completed a six-week Girls For Technology Accelerator, and won the first place prize of \$10,000.

**Sourcery** launched Sourcery Anywhere, allowing document scanning requests from any collecting institution in the United States. They also added Project Lead Amanda Breeden to the UConn Greenhouse Studios team as a Post-MLS Research Associate.



**STMPatch** won the annual SXSW Pitch's 'Food, Nutrition, and Health' category, beating nearly 1,000 competition applicants and 45 finalists (pictured above). They pitched at Startup Investor Accelerator (SIA) and received \$125,000. They also participated in the Seattle Angel Conference and received \$175,000.

**Swipestorm** represented UConn at the 2024 Big East Startup Challenge, placing second.

**Therapeutic Bandage Products** received patent acceptance from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for all 20 claims in its first office action through UConn. They submitted a non-provisional patent for their tick-tester through TBP. Their team was accepted into UConn's TIP Program, and now operate a laboratory in the Advanced Technology Laboratory in Storrs, CT. They have two students funded through the TIP Summer Fellowship program, one of whom is doing her honors thesis based on the work in their lab. Their team, with the help and support of CCEI faculty, was accepted into the NSF I-Corps National Program. They also added Lori Burdick, Ph.D. '15 (CLAS), '22 (BUS), '23 (CLAS), to their staff as a scientist and business development officer.

**Transcend Bicycle** filed one patent and two provisional patents.



**Veradermics'** co-founder and CEO Reid Waldman, who completed his dermatology residency at UConn Health, was selected for Forbes' 2024 '30 Under 30' list in the Healthcare category (pictured above). They announced a commenced dosing in a First-in-Human clinical trial of VDPHL, an investigational, proprietary, non-hormonal oral treatment being developed for pattern hair loss. They participated in 2024's Biotech Showcase, which was held virtually and in San Francisco, CA.



**Zuri** was accepted into the 2024 cohort (pictured above) of the UC Davis Betty Irene Moore Scholarship and secured funding for the next three years.







# YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS.

At CCEI, we value the importance of our connections, both in our community and across Connecticut's companies, to support an entrepreneurial ecosystem. To fuel our growth and vision, we rely on our committed program sponsors and donors. With their dedication, CCEI's sponsors and donors\* bridge the gap between startups and fully fledged companies.

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As we reflect on the success of this year's UConn Gives campaign, we are overwhelmed with gratitude for the unwavering support and generosity of the CCEI community. The contributions have demonstrated a profound commitment to fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and growth within our programming.

At CCEI, we firmly believe in the power of community to drive positive change and create lasting impact, and these donations serve as a testament to the strength of our vision and dedication to advancing entrepreneurship.



This final donation tally, which includes numbers and matches from both the CCEI venture programming page and the EBV donation page, will directly fuel our programs, enabling us to expand initiatives, enhance resources, and provide opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs to follow their venture dreams.

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