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Great Ideas rewarded in WEDC's inaugural Downtown Pitch Contest

Winner receives \$10,000 to make their idea a reality, 12 regional finalists recognized

MADISON, WI. June 18, 2021 – Twelve downtown businesses from Main Street and Connect Community programs from around the state are a little closer to launching their ideas after being named finalists in the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation's (WEDC's) first Downtown Pitch Contest.

Chef Pam's Kitchen in downtown Waukesha, which placed first in the competition, will receive \$10,000 toward the creation of a local foods retail space to complement their commercial kitchen and cooking school, while Stevens Point's Sunset Point Winery and Osceola's Wisconsin Milk House were also recognized as top three finalists, receiving \$5,000 each. The remaining finalists will receive \$1,500 each.

The concept of entrepreneur pitch contests is not new, but such contests are often used to boost technology, inventions or other high-growth sectors. The first-ever Downtown Pitch Contest recognizes that innovation comes in all forms, and great ideas on Main Street deserve to be supported.

Existing businesses or would-be entrepreneurs from Wisconsin's 35 Main Street and 77 Connect Community program districts were invited to submit their great ideas to the contest. Applications consisted of written responses and a 5-minute video explaining their idea. From these entries, regional judging panels selected three finalists from each of four geographic regions of the state.

"The diversity of size, industry and geography in the pitches we received really showcases the talent and passion of our downtown business owners and entrepreneurs," said Missy Hughes, WEDC secretary and CEO. "The creativity of these entrepreneurs adds so much vibrancy to Wisconsin's downtowns."

Finalists were selected from within each region in a competitive process based on the viability of their business concept, creativity and innovation of the concept and pitch materials, and the degree to which the business meets community needs and contributes to downtown vitality.

The finalists were:

- The Copper Pasty – Ashland
- Sunnyside Café – Black River Falls
- The Mercantile Business Space – Coloma
- Foundation Fitness & Nutrition – Darlington

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- Midwest Woodturners – Ellsworth
- Gathered Roots – Fond du Lac
- Wisconsin Milk House – Osceola
- The Sweet Tooth – Prairie du Chien
- Wings of Fire Consulting – Racine
- Process General Store – Stevens Point
- Sunset Point Winery – Stevens Point
- Chef Pam’s Kitchen – Waukesha

More information on the finalists:

Chef Pam’s Kitchen – Waukesha: <https://www.chefpamskitchen.com/>

Since opening in 2019, Chef Pam’s Kitchen has become a hub for food artisans in the Waukesha area. In addition to offering a wide variety of cooking classes, events and other activities, the kitchen serves as a home base for food entrepreneurs who rent out commercial kitchen space to support their growing enterprises. The new and expanded location will add space to grow each of these business segments, accommodate a new winter farmers’ market which can be housed in the space and offer a retail outlet for kitchen tenants

Sunset Point Winery – Stevens Point: <https://www.sunsetpointwinery.com/>

Since opening in 2015, Don and Kelly Guay have continually grown Sunset Point Winery into a destination within downtown Stevens Point, growing wine production from three varieties to more than 35 labels as well as expanding their physical footprint. The winery is looking to expand again, adding a second tasting room that has event hosting capabilities and a balcony space with a pass-through service window to accommodate continued demand for outdoor seating. These additions will help the business rebound from COVID and meet the changing needs of a growing customer base.

Wisconsin Milk House – Osceola: <https://wisconsinmilkhouse.com/>

Owner Lisa Erickson is passionate about Wisconsin dairy. After writing a book and managing a dairy, she has set her sights on opening a true dairy experience. The Milk House will sell and sample a wide variety of dairy products and complementary meats, wine and beer, as well as artisan-made platters, knives and other retail goods. The shop will also offer limited prepared meal items, host educational classes and otherwise cater to the numerous local, regional and interstate travelers that visit downtown Osceola.

The Copper Pasty – Ashland: <https://www.facebook.com/copperpasty/>

Victoria Peters started making pasties in 2015 after moving from the Upper Peninsula to Seattle and suffering from pasty withdrawal. Now back in the Midwest, Victoria has been renting kitchen space at the Chequamegon Food Cooperative and selling at local markets and via delivery. She is now ready to renovate a storefront to open a full-time business making her custom pasties for locals and visitors alike.

Sunnyside Café – Black River Falls

Seeing a need for breakfast and healthy lunch fare in downtown, local restaurant veterans Tina Rowlee and Lisa Hanson identified a location and started work on a business plan. With a plan in place, the duo hope to open later this summer to offer home-cooked breakfast and fresh-made baked goods for locals, workers and visitors.

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The Mercantile Business Space – Coloma

A large vacant space in the heart of downtown Coloma attracted a partnership of local entrepreneurs to renovate the space as home to a collective of women-owned businesses. Veteran local renovators Susan and Dennis Apps purchased the property and have plans to renovate it as home to two businesses offering goods and services not otherwise available in the region. The first two tenants will be a yoga studio and chocolate shop, both currently operating as home-based businesses in the region and ready to expand into permanent storefronts.

Foundation Fitness & Nutrition –

Darlington: <https://www.facebook.com/foundationfitnessnutrition/>

This new business has already experienced rapid growth, delivering their healthy and locally-sourced meals to multiple southwestern Wisconsin communities. Their next phase involves establishing a dedicated kitchen and storefront and adding a refrigerated truck to continue to expand capacity and customer base.

Midwest Woodturners – Ellsworth: <https://www.facebook.com/midwestwoodturners/>

Chad Stevenson's small woodworking business has grown from a small basement studio selling products at craft markets to offering group classes and custom products for a growing customer market. The business needs space for storage, classes and as a showroom for their larger products. A downtown Ellsworth building fits the bill, and Midwest Woodturners hopes to transform this building into their future home and grow into a full-time business to serve the community.

Gathered Roots – Fond du Lac: <https://gatheredrootsfdl.com/>

Husband and wife team Donna Pierce and Lawrence Foster hope to offer a curated selection of the best products made, manufactured and grown in the Fond du Lac area, under one roof. Located in a high visibility storefront in downtown as well as online, the shop will offer Fond du Lac branded merchandise as well as the widest available assortment of locally-made goods, including a small patio area for enjoying coffee and snacks or hosting small-scale events.

The Sweet Tooth – Prairie du Chien: <https://www.thesweettoothpdc.com/>

Having survived COVID, The Sweet Tooth – Prairie du Chien's only candy shop - is hoping to expand into a larger storefront within the downtown. The shop features traditional favorites, nostalgic candy and unique soda varieties. The new shop would allow the business to expand inventory and also add interactive merchandising and exhibits to make the shop a visitor attraction and regular destination for area families.

Wings of Fire Consulting – Racine: <https://wingsoffireconsulting.com/>

Wings of Fire is a wellness business that grew out of popup events in 2017. Owner Kristina Watanabe saw the potential to network and support wellness entrepreneurs in a shared space. After winning \$2,500 in the Gateway Technical College Business Accelerator, the business moved from popups to permanent with a fully furnished space offering wellness services that can be rented by multiple service providers. This provides a cost-effective strategy for practitioners as well as a convenient wellness hub for customers.

Process General Store – Stevens Point: <https://lowwaste.shop/>

This low-waste lifestyle store with locations in Stevens Point and in Amherst is hoping to expand their mail-order refill program to allow the business to better serve rural customers that can't travel to the shops as often. This not only meets the needs of their customers but supports their

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values of a reduced carbon footprint. The funds will support this expansion by purchasing special refillable containers and packaging and creating a bulk refill system to fulfill orders.

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About the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) leads economic development efforts for the state by advancing and maximizing opportunities in Wisconsin for businesses, communities and people to thrive in a globally competitive environment. Working with more than 600 regional and local partners, WEDC develops and delivers solutions representative of a highly responsive and coordinated economic development network. Visit wedc.org or follow WEDC on Twitter @WEDCNews to learn more.

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