

PRESS RELEASE – Immediate Release
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OFFICE of BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP: Inaugural Legislative Day at the Capitol

Six Wisconsin small business owners visit legislators, share success stories

(MADISON, WI) -- The Universities of Wisconsin's [Office of Business & Entrepreneurship](#) (OBE) held its inaugural 'Legislative Day at the Capitol' on Wednesday, May 7, 2025, coinciding with the U.S. Small Business Administration's [National Small Business Week](#), which honors the contributions of entrepreneurs and small businesses who bring their ideas to life and grow our economy.

Representatives from OBE's four units visited with legislators showcasing the work done to enhance the value of Wisconsin, one business at a time.

The primary goal of Legislative Day was to introduce law makers to the work OBE does across the state that promotes small business growth and technological innovation. By connecting directly with legislators, OBE highlighted the importance of their work, and the significant impacts small businesses realize when they engage with them.

"With nearly half of Wisconsin's workforce employed by small businesses, their success is essential to the state's prosperity," said Bon Wikenheiser, executive director of the Office of Business and Entrepreneurship. "Each year, we support over 7,000 entrepreneurs through technical assistance and programming delivered by our four units. By meeting directly with legislators, we had the opportunity to showcase the vital role our work plays in helping small businesses thrive."

OBE's four units include:

1. [CTC – Center for Technology Commercialization](#) – providing no-cost, expert guidance and funding support to help local businesses bring innovative technologies from idea to market.
2. [FFI – Food Finance Institute](#) – providing the tools for entrepreneurs to succeed in the food, beverage, and value-added ag business sectors.
3. [SBDC – Small Business Development Centers](#) – located on 11 campuses in the Universities of Wisconsin constellation, the SBDCs offer consulting, education, referrals, and sophisticated tools and resources, whether you're just getting started or looking for ways to improve your business.
4. [Strategic Projects](#) – administering Main Street Bounce Back technical assistance, small business clinics, digital marketing clinics, and State Small Business Credit Initiative Technical Assistance Center (SSBCI).

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“One of the biggest objectives in this effort was to begin building lasting relationships between OBE and legislators,” reported Paula Gilbeck, strategic communications and outreach for OBE. “We needed to share information on key issues related to small business and tech innovation here in Wisconsin. Ultimately we want to be a go-to resource for input when our elected officials are working on relevant policies, and I think we made some strong first impressions during our visits.”

The six small businesses that took the time to join OBE on their inaugural day at the Capitol included businesses from all over Wisconsin:

1. [CONOVATE](#) – Dr. Carol Hirshmugl, CEO – *Milwaukee*
2. [STEM PHARM](#) – Steve Visuri, PhD, CEO – *Madison*
3. [FORTUNE FAVORS](#) – Sam McDaniel, CEO – *Madison*
4. [CONFLUENCE GRAPHICS](#) – Courtney Skinkis, President – *Milwaukee*
5. [PEGGY BAKES](#) – Peggy Sonnenburg, founder – *Valders*
6. [MCMERRIL MEDIA](#) – Ian McMerrill – owner – *Ripon*

All six of the companies listed above shared their success stories during their office visits and explained to legislators how they achieved growth and additional capital due to their work with the four units of OBE.

Steve Visuri detailed how his company, STEM PHARM, develops stem cells to help with Alzheimer’s research. He was able to use both the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and the Center for Technology Commercialization (CTC) for his patent work and customer discovery. “CTC offered course work and start-up training,” said Visuri. “And the mentors really helped. I’d suggest working through the OBE units for anyone thinking about starting a business.”

Specific “success stories” are linked below featuring four of the small businesses featured:

[CONOVATE](#)

[FORTUNE FAVORS](#)

[STEM PHARM](#)

[CONFLUENCE GRAPHICS](#)

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*The Office of Business & Entrepreneurship (OBE) provides specialized resources and helps clients craft personalized plans to grow their businesses. For more information about OBE visit us as <https://business.wisconsin.edu>
OBE is part of the world-class Universities of Wisconsin.*