Bulldog B.I.T.E.

BUILDING INNOVATION BY TRUMAN ENTREPRENEURS

BULLDOG PITCH DAY

ELEVATOR PITCH COMPETITION

FINALS

Thursday, November 14, 2024
1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

sponsored by

VILLHARD GROWTH PARTNERS
A MIDWEST-BASED GROWTH BUYOUT FUND

On-Campus Support provided by

THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

CCE COMMUNITY OF COLLEGE ENTREPRENEURS

THE OFFICE OF ADVANCEMENT

Bulldog Pitch Day Participants

Brunswick R-II High School - Breanne Harmon

Sydnee Brashear

Hollie Widmer

Kirksville Area Technical Center - Michele Thurlo

Jesse Bishoff

Hunter Combs

Austin Martin and Denver Cunningham

Addy Davis

Lake Downing and Brantley Kottwitz

Baylee Gashwiler

Meradith Helmer and Kierra Manyx

Sean James

Jace Kent, Hayden Davis and Connor Hall

Cloud Lomongo and Cad Roxas

Levi Martin

Alia Puckett and Victoria Hennke

Ella Seedorf and Meia Shahan

Kellen Simmons, Grayson Houser and Zach Treasure

Austin Springer, Logan Martin and Diamond Kangiela

Drussile Mpunga Tshienda

Zoe Wright, Lindsey Smith and Chloe Ratliff

Knox County R-I - Brandi Wriedt

Laithen Engelbrecht

Sean Nelson

Wyatt Vargas

Rachel Webb

North Callaway High School - Reid Randolph

Isabelle Borcherding

Paris High School - Amanda Drew

Kelly Mitchell

Elijah Reynolds

Schuyler R-I - Sharon Priebe

Jarrett Groseclose and Carter Hoffmeyer

Bulldog B.I.T.E. Finalists

Saron Gebremichael and Nahom Jember

Saron: Sophomore, Computer Science, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Nahom: Sophomore, Business Administration, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Sujata Basnet

Junior, Statistics
Kathmandu, Nepal

Victor Hoang and Jobe Weber

Victor: Freshman, Business Administration and Economics, Washington, Missouri
Jobe: Freshman, Business Administration, Washington, Missouri

Eyerusalem Mekuria

Junior, Economics
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Tomás Orjuela Munoz

Junior, Double Major: International Business Administration and Economics
Bogotá, Colombia

Dane Winterboer

Senior, Statistics
Kansas City, Missouri

FINANCIAL AWARDS

Bulldog Pitch Day and Bulldog B.I.T.E. are funded through the generous support of alumni and friends to the following Truman State University Foundation funds:

Villhard Innovation Fund
Lt. Gen. Shien Min Ku and Shih Chin Ku Entrepreneurship Fund

This year's first place award for the Bulldog B.I.T.E. Pitch Competition is provided through a generous gift from Truman alumna and Bulldog B.I.T.E. finals judge, Amanda Gioia ('93). This year's second place award for the Bulldog B.I.T.E. Pitch Competition is provided through a generous gift from Truman alumni Michael ('99) and Caroline ('97) Heckman.

FINAL ROUND JUDGES

Stephanie Bell ('05)

Stephanie Bell graduated from Truman State University with a degree in political science. In 2009, she graduated from Mizzou with a juris doctor and a Master of Public Administration. She then entered private practice as an attorney focusing on state and local government matters including election, regulatory, utility, gaming, tax and other governmental disputes. Stephanie's litigation practice includes representing clients before government agencies, the Administrative Hearing Commission, the Public Service Commission, circuit courts and Missouri appellate courts.

In 2018, Stephanie co-founded a boutique law firm - Ellinger and Associates LLC and became a named partner of Ellinger Bell LLC in 2022. Her practice has grown to include representation of statewide elected officials, proponents of statewide ballot measures, and Fortune 100 companies. In 2020, Stephanie was appointed to the Board of Aldermen in Ashland, Missouri, and continues to serve in that capacity.

In 2021, Stephanie joined "Wake Up Mid-Missouri" as a co-host. The weekday morning radio program airs on 93.9 the Eagle in Columbia and 104.1 KWOS News Radio in Jefferson City. In 2022, Stephanie and her husband purchased The Trolley Company, a popular Jefferson City business which offers historic trolleys for hire for weddings, conferences and other special events. She continues her full-time law practice in addition to her morning radio program.

Stephanie has been recognized as "Rising Star" by Missouri/Kansas Super Lawyers, as a "Missouri Political Pro You Should Know" by the Missouri Times, and as "The Best of Jefferson City Women in Business" by the News Tribune. Stephanie lives in Ashland, Missouri, with her husband Chris ('05), and their three children: Drew, Amelia and Eden.

Laci Cook ('03)

After 15 years of business ownership in a completely different industry, Laci Cook opened Sip Downtown in February 2021. Sip offers handcrafted cocktails, wines, small-plate dining, and live music in a sophisticated and cozy atmosphere.

For almost 20 years, Laci has been a noteworthy leader in the Kirksville community. She was the recipient of Kirksville's "5 Under 40" Award and named the 2019 Kirksville Daily Express "Person of the Year." She serves on the City of Kirksville's Tourism Board and the Kirksville Area Chamber of Commerce Board and volunteers for many other organizations throughout the community. In 2024, she founded Laci Cook Consuting LLC to aid small businesses and entrepreneurs. Laci graduated from Truman State University with a Bachelor of Science in agricultural science.

Amanda Gioia ('93)

Amanda Gioia has been with Mastercard for more than 20 years and has held a variety of leadership roles for the company, including serving as vice president, technology risk management, communications and partnerships; vice president for information technology service management; and as vice president for the Worldwide Communications Team, where she was responsible for managing and implementing internal communications, leadership communications and philanthropy for the company's technology organization.

Prior to joining Mastercard, Amanda was an account executive with Kupper Parker Communications and a senior marketing coordinator for Sverdrup Civil, Inc. Amanda is the Board President of the St. Louis Area Foodbank and a board member of Autism Speaks. She serves on the Advisory Board for the School of Communications for Webster University and as a member of the Truman State University Foundation Board of Directors.

Among her many innovation activities with Truman, Amanda has participated in the Bulldog B.I.T.E. competition since its inception. In 2019, she was selected as the Bentele/Mallinckrodt Executive in Residence at Truman, and in 2022 she was recognized with the Distinguished Service Award. Amanda has a Master of Arts in media communications from Webster University and a Bachelor of Arts in English literature from Truman.

Mike Heckman ('99)

Mike Heckman brings more than 20 years of senior executive experience across diverse industries. As an accomplished leader, he is passionate about advancing innovative healthcare solutions, managing complex operations, and crafting strategic plans to navigate intricate business landscapes. Mike currently serves on both for-profit and non-profit boards within healthcare and the natural sciences, with a particular emphasis on growth and new market expansion.

Previously, Mike held corporate executive roles at Cerner, where he thrived as an intrapreneur. Today, he channels his energy into entrepreneurship in the Kansas

City area, focusing on investing, advising and operating businesses that drive meaningful change in healthcare.

Mike holds a Bachelor of Science from Truman, an MBA from Harvard Business School, and is a fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives. Residing in Parkville, Missouri, with his wife and three children, Mike is a dedicated Chiefs fan who enjoys camping, motorcycle riding and spending time outdoors.

R.J. Lindstrom ('05)

R.J. is the owner and president of Zephyr Manufacturing, a 97-year-old fourth-generation manufacturing company based in Sedalia, Missouri. Zephyr manufactures mops, brooms, brushes and associated products sold to the industrial cleaning industry all over the United States. He is also the owner of Quality Rubber Company, which manufactures natural rubber vulcanized sponges that are used in the restoration industry to clean smoke and soot damage from walls and other hard surfaces.

Outside of his businesses, R.J. is active on several boards, both in his community and in his professional industries. This includes being the vice president of the American Brush Manufacturers Association, a national organization that serves to promote and preserve the long tradition of American manufacturing in this unrenowned, but very important industry. He is also on the board for Associated Industries of Missouri, a statewide organization whose mission is to promote a favorable business climate for business, manufacturing and industry in the state of Missouri. R.J. has also been on the board for the Boys & Girls Clubs of West Central Missouri for almost 15 years. The Club serves more than 600 kids every day in Sedalia and surrounding communities.

R.J. lives in Sedalia with his wife Lisa ('05) and their three children. He graduated from Truman with a Bachelor of Arts degree in business administration and psychology.

QUALIFYING ROUND JUDGES

Dane Stangler ('01)

Dane is the vice president of strategic initiatives at the Bipartisan Policy Center. He is also a senior advisor at the Global Entrepreneurship Network. Previously, he was president and chief policy officer of Startup Genome and vice president of research and policy at the Kauffman Foundation. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English from Truman and a juris doctor from the University of Wisconsin.

Dan Schmidt ('02)

Dan Schmidt is the founder and principal at EBCFO LLC, an outsourced accounting and CFO advisory services firm serving growth-stage, mission-driven organizations, and a partner and co-founder at Mission Accounting and Advisory Partners LLC.

With a background in public accounting audit, consulting and advisory services, Dan brings a cross-disciplinary approach to projects and services, helping connect the various disciplines to promote organizational growth and alignment with strategic objectives. He is a frequent speaker at national events on the intersection of technology, finance and operations, and believes in the ability of work to promote human flourishing, and to provide opportunities for individuals to live out their unique callings. He also sits on multiple nonprofit boards that serve in the refugee, entrepreneurial education, and learning disability sectors.

Dan lives with his wife Gina, three sons and one exuberant goldendoodle in Colorado Springs, and spends his free time involved in outdoor activities and folk music.

PRACTICE ROUND JUDGES

Stephanie Ahrens-Mills ('07, '11)

Stephanie Ahrens-Mills was born in Jefferson City, Missouri, and later made Kirksville her home. She graduated from Truman with a Bachelor of Arts in communication and a master's in education. Stephanie is deeply invested in her community, serving as past president of the Kirksville Area Chamber of Commerce, secretary for Missouri Northeast Partnership, and a K-REDI board member, among other roles. She also founded Fairy Godmother Inc., a nonprofit supporting 20 counties in northeast Missouri.

Stephanie currently serves as the manager of communications, member services, and economic development at Tri-County Electric. She lives in Kirksville with her husband Jerry and their two daughters, Evey and Adalynn.

Bryce Cardwell

Bryce Cardwell is a small business counselor at the Northeast Missouri Small Business Development Center and Missouri Rural Enterprise and Innovation Center. He received his master's in business administration from Northwest Missouri State University. He was formerly employed at Truman as a career counselor and at Northwest Missouri State University as a financial aid counselor. He is also a licensed real estate agent.

Tarasa Gardner

Tarasa Gardner is a professor and distinguished educator at Moberly Area Community College (MACC), where she has taught English and literature courses since 2008. With a Bachelor of Arts from Graceland University and a Master of Arts in English from Northwest Missouri State University, Tarasa has focused much of her work at MACC in restructuring the developmental English program, including placement, course offerings, curriculum and assessment. For her work and its results, she has been awarded the Mel Aytes Faculty Innovation Award, the MACC Innovation Award and is a two-time recipient of the PTK Glaux Award for Faculty.

Additionally, Tarasa is an AP English language and composition reader for CollegeBoard, has served as an HLC assurance argument co-chair and strategic planning work group co-chair, has contributed to the Missouri co-requisite at Scale Taskforce, and served on the executive council of the Missouri Developmental Education Consortium.

Beyond her work at MACC, Tarasa is an entrepreneur as a certified yoga instructor and studio owner. She is a 500 E-RYT with Yoga Alliance, owning and operating two yoga studios: the online Yoga with TG studio and Kirksville's first yoga studio, the You, Yourself and Yoga studio located at 915 E. Jefferson St.

Anastasia Tiedemann

Anastasia Tiedemann is the executive director of Kirksville Regional Economic Development Inc., and Missouri Rural Enterprise and Innovation Center. She has more than 20 years of experience in marketing and entrepreneurial education. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in communications from the University of Pittsburgh and began her career at WQED, Pittsburgh Public Television, followed by Hawthorne Direct in Iowa. She then spent almost 15 years at The Professional Education Institute in their suburban Chicago location, working behind-the-scenes in the planning, execution and compliance of numerous television marketing campaigns, and provided support to their personal coaching programs and e-learning initiatives. Anastasia resides in Kirksville with her husband, Nate, and their 5 children.

About Bulldog B.I.T.E. and Bulldog Pitch Day

With the financial and professional support of Doug ('94) and Diane ('95) Villhard, Truman State University is proud to present the finals for both Bulldog B.I.T.E. and Bulldog Pitch Day. Both competitions follow an elevator pitch format. Bulldog Pitch Day is for high school students, and Bulldog B.I.T.E. is for college students.

In an elevator pitch competition, presenters outline a concept or idea for a product, service, or project in a short period of time, typically from 30 seconds to three minutes. The length of the pitch mirrors the time spent waiting for and riding an elevator in a high-rise building. The purpose of the pitch is to spur the interest of a potential investor or financial backer.

About the Sponsor

Villhard Growth Partners is a St. Louis-based growth buyout firm that invests in, partners with and grows strong, tech-enabled businesses and healthcare services companies. They focus on lower market transactions in which they can invest alongside aggressive, entrepreneurial teams that share their passion for growing and building great businesses.

About the Community of College Entrepreneurs (CCE)

The Community of College Entrepreneurs at Truman State University is a student group that fosters the spirit of entrepreneurship on campus by promoting a network of innovative mindsets from various backgrounds. They promote entrepreneurial endeavors that lead to building wealth at a young age and advance new ideas that benefit the community. They also host campus-wide events featuring notable entrepreneurs to demystify what it takes to begin a successful business.

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