

Apprenticeship Connections wins community pitch night prize  
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The third annual Tom Tom Founders Festival began Wednesday with a competition where community members proposed ideas they believe will become the next Charlottesville innovation.

After 10 pitches, the audience at The Haven named a group that matches young adults into apprenticeships with professionals as the winner of a \$5,000 grant and other assistance toward developing its idea.

“Our apprentices learn transferrable and practical skills and make cross-community relationships that last a lifetime,” said Helene Hamady, director of Apprenticeship Connections and a self-described “Millennial.”

The idea for the program came from founder Anne Tilney, a recent graduate of Charlottesville’s Community Investment Collaborative, an entrepreneurship mentoring group. She listed cheesemongers, website designers, entrepreneurs and butchers as masters who would be involved in passing on their professions to the next generation.

“There are many young people who would like to learn by doing,” Tilney said. “We help them do that while supporting local industries who can use those students.”

Katie Painter, a local business owner, came to the event with an open mind. She said all the ideas

touched on needs in Charlottesville. She used her marble to cast a vote for Tilney and Hamady's pitch, because it was relevant to her experience.

"About 50 percent of people under 34 are either looking for a job or underemployed," Painter said. "I connected with that, knowing people in similar situations."

Apprenticeship Connections will begin as a pilot program this summer with five student-master pairs connected in month-long apprenticeships.

As part of their prize package, Tilney and Hamady will have the opportunity to join the program this fall, an entrepreneurial incubator of the Batten Institute at the University of Virginia's Darden Graduate School of Business Administration. There they can create an interactive website connecting students and the community with masters, as well as an online store of masters' goods and services.



*Votes are counted to determine the winning pitch at the Crowd-funded Pitch Night & Concert on Wednesday at The Haven, part of the Tom Tom Founders Festival in Charlottesville, Va. Photo / Ryan M. Kelly / The Daily Progress*

This is the second year that Tom Tom has partnered with the for the community pitch competition. Phillippe Sommer, involved with managing the , said for the university's program to be successful, it must involve the greater community. The currently holds 24 groups — half Darden students and half from outside the school.

"Entrepreneurship is a contact sport, but it is mostly a community effort," Sommer said. "Why don't we let the community decide who should be in the ?"

Paul Beyer, the founder and organizer of Tom Tom, said he considers the crowd-funded pitch night to be among the festival's best events each year.

"This kicks of the next five days in which Charlottesville becomes a creative campus," Beyer said. "[The pitch night] shows all the different ways people can become entrepreneurs."

Other ideas presented ranged from community cooking lessons to a mobile car stereo installation service, to an affordable laboratory kit that would introduce students to science and technology.

Second place went to a group of students with the idea to create a hub for biotechnology innovation in Charlottesville. The third-place winner was local business Stevie G's Gluten Free Bakery.

The Tom Tom Founders Festivals continues with programming through Sunday, including more than 60 concerts and speakers on topics such as entrepreneurship, education and food.