



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** July 9, 2026

**STartUP Northshore Announces Finalists for THE LAUNCHPAD Summer 2026 Pitch Competition**

*Three early-stage founders will compete for a share of a \$5,000 prize pool on July 23 in Mandeville*

**Key Details:**

- Finalists selected for STartUP Northshore's early-stage pitch competition, THE LAUNCHPAD
- Three entrepreneurs will compete for their share of a \$5,000 prize pool
- Event takes place July 23 at North Star Theatre in Mandeville, with a reception at 5 p.m., and program at 6 p.m.
- Tickets are free and open to the public; registration is encouraged

**COVINGTON, La.** – STartUP Northshore has announced the three finalists selected to compete in the Summer 2026 series of THE LAUNCHPAD, a live startup pitch competition showcasing some of the Northshore's most promising early-stage entrepreneurs.

Selected from a competitive applicant pool, the finalists will take the stage July 23 at the North Star Theatre and Cultural Center in Mandeville, where they will present their businesses before a live audience and a distinguished panel of judges while competing for a \$5,000 grant prize pool.

The winner will receive a \$3,000 grant, while each runner-up will receive \$1,000 to help accelerate the next stage of their business.

The three finalists advancing to the live competition represent a range of early-stage ventures:

- **Michael Bishop, founder of IBEX**, is developing innovative equipment that improves safety, stability, and efficiency for professionals working on steep-sloped roofs.
- **Marci Clines, co-founder of IronRose Legacy Group**, leads a minority woman-owned workforce solutions company specializing in industrial staffing for the Gulf Coast oil and gas industry.
- **Sarah Cooper Smith, founder of Northshore Bath Co.**, created Cloud Glove, a patent-pending organic cotton bath glove designed for babies and individuals with sensitive skin.

"THE LAUNCHPAD is about much more than one night of competition. It's about giving entrepreneurs the confidence to believe bigger, tell their story more effectively, and connect with the people who can help move their businesses forward," said Cenzo Caronna, entrepreneur-in-residence for St. Tammany Economic Development Corporation and executive director of STartUP Northshore.

"This year's finalists, spanning consumer products, industrial workforce solutions, and occupational safety innovation, reflect the incredible breadth of entrepreneurial talent emerging across the Northshore. We're proud to create opportunities that help founders turn great ideas into thriving businesses."

In preparation for the live competition, each finalist will receive individualized coaching from Abbey Lovett, CEO and founder of Pathos Coaching and a three-time national champion speaker, helping them strengthen their story, refine their presentation, and prepare to take the stage.

Finalists will be evaluated by a panel of leaders with extensive experience in founder development, startup growth, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and access to capital, offering perspectives from nonprofit leadership, statewide innovation, and venture-backed entrepreneurship.

Judges include:

- **Jay Huffstatler, executive director of OnPath Foundation**, leads the organization's initiatives supporting entrepreneurship, education, and financial resilience while bringing more than 20 years of nonprofit leadership experience.
- **Kelly A. Raney, executive director of innovation operations at Louisiana Innovation**, oversees statewide innovation and small business capital programs, working with entrepreneurs, investors, lenders, and economic development organizations across Louisiana.
- **Lane Degenhardt, co-founder and COO of happycampr**, is a Techstars founder and winner of the STartUP Northshore's 2025 NSpire Startup Slam, bringing firsthand experience building and scaling an early-stage venture.

THE LAUNCHPAD is part of STartUP Northshore's broader entrepreneurial support ecosystem, which provides founders with coaching, mentorship, educational programming, networking opportunities, and access to capital from idea through growth. In addition to THE LAUNCHPAD, STartUP Northshore offers programs including the IDEAINSTITUTE *Northshore* accelerator, founder workshops, investor readiness programming, and one-on-one entrepreneurial support throughout the year.

The Summer 2026 edition of THE LAUNCHPAD will take place July 23 at the North Star Theatre and Cultural Center in Mandeville. A networking reception begins at 5 p.m., followed by the live competition at 6 p.m. Admission is free and open to the public and registration is encouraged at [startupnorthshore.com/the-launchpad](https://startupnorthshore.com/the-launchpad).

#### **About STartUP Northshore**

STartUP Northshore is cultivating a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem through strategic partnerships with leading organizations in the startup community, including the Louisiana Small Business Development Center at Southeastern Louisiana University and The Idea Village, to deliver first-class programming for entrepreneurs and second-stage companies. STartUP Northshore is supported by a regional collaboration among St. Tammany Economic Development Corporation, Tangipahoa Economic Development, and Washington Economic Development Foundation. Through this initiative, the next wave of local entrepreneurs from all three parishes gain access to immersive education, dynamic networking opportunities, and mentorship from industry leaders, experienced founders, and capital investors - all delivered on the Northshore. STartUP Northshore is managed by St. Tammany Economic Development Corporation. For more information about STartUP Northshore, please visit [startupnorthshore.com](https://startupnorthshore.com).

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