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STartUP Northshore Opens Applications for Return of THE LAUNCHPAD Pitch Competition
OnPath Foundation Joins as Presenting Sponsor to Support Early-Stage Entrepreneurs Across the Northshore

COVINGTON, La. – Today, STartUP Northshore announced the return of THE LAUNCHPAD, a live high-energy pitch competition spotlighting early-stage entrepreneurs from across the Northshore. The event will be held at North Star Theatre in Mandeville on Thursday, July 23. **Applications are now open and will close on Sunday, July 5, 2026, at 11:59 PM.**

Designed to provide early-stage founders with a high-visibility platform, individualized pitch coaching, and access to startup resources, THE LAUNCHPAD helps entrepreneurs refine their ideas, strengthen their stories, and connect with the mentors, investors, and community members who can support their next stage of growth. Three finalists will compete for a \$5,000 prize pool, awarding \$3,000 for the winning pitch and \$1,000 for each runner-up – helping to bring their next big move within reach while encouraging entrepreneurial growth on the Northshore.

This year, STartUP Northshore is proud to welcome OnPath Foundation as the 2026 Presenting Sponsor of THE LAUNCHPAD for two competitions. Through its support, OnPath Foundation is helping expand access to entrepreneurial programming and invest in the bold ideas shaping the future of the region.

“At the OnPath Foundation, we believe strong communities are built by investing in people with bold ideas and the drive to create meaningful impact,” said **Jay Huffstatler, Executive Director of OnPath Foundation**. “That’s why we’re proud to partner with STartUP Northshore on THE LAUNCHPAD and support emerging entrepreneurs as they take the next step in growing their businesses. Entrepreneurship is one of the Foundation’s core pillars, and we’re excited to celebrate and invest in innovators who are helping shape the future of our region.”

Building on the success of STartUP Northshore’s premiere pitch competition, the NSpire Startup Slam, THE LAUNCHPAD offers a complementary platform for early-stage founders who are working to get their ideas off the ground. The competition is part of STartUP Northshore’s growing program pipeline, which also includes IDEAinstitute *Northshore* as well as multiple resources designed to support entrepreneurs throughout their startup journey.

“THE LAUNCHPAD continues to create meaningful opportunities for founders to test their ideas, sharpen their message, and build momentum,” said **Cenzo Caronna, St. Tammany Economic Development Corporation Entrepreneur-in-Residence and STartUP Northshore Executive Director**. “Through this program, founders gain more than just pitch experience. They gain feedback, mentorship, visibility, and meaningful connections that help accelerate their growth. With support from our great partners at OnPath Foundation, we’re expanding access to those opportunities and helping strengthen the pipeline of early-stage entrepreneurs across the Northshore.”

For the winner of last year’s inaugural event, THE LAUNCHPAD served as both a business development opportunity and a personal growth experience.

“THE LAUNCHPAD didn’t just help grow my business, it helped shape the leader and storyteller behind it,” said **Chris Andry, Founder of WSPER**. “One of the biggest areas of growth has been how I communicate about the business. The LAUNCHPAD helped me refine not only my pitch deck, but also my story. I learned how to better explain the ‘why’ behind what I’m building, connect with people more effectively, and present my company with greater confidence and purpose.”

The competition will feature finalists pitching live to a panel of expert judges. Finalists will receive individualized coaching prior to the event and compete for startup funding and resources designed to help advance their business.

To learn more about this event, apply to pitch your business, or register to attend, visit startupnorthshore.com/the-launchpad or contact STartUP Northshore Executive Director Cenzo Caronna at vcaronna@sttammanyedc.org.

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.

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