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IBEX Wins STartUP Northshore's Summer 2026 THE LAUNCHPAD Pitch Competition
Innovative Startup Developing Safety Equipment for Roofing Professionals Receives \$3,000 grant

Key Details:

- Michael Bishop, Founder of IBEX, wins Summer 2026 THE LAUNCHPAD pitch competition
- Winning founder receives a \$3,000 grant to support the company's next stage
- Fellow finalists Northshore Bath Co. and IronRose Legacy Group each receive \$1,000 grants
- Grant prize package powered by OnPath Foundation

COVINGTON, La. – STartUP Northshore has named IBEX the winner of their summer 2026 THE LAUNCHPAD pitch competition. The Slidell-based startup earned the top award after presenting alongside two other finalists before a live audience and panel of judges at the North Star Theatre and Cultural Center in Mandeville last night.

Michael Bishop, Founder of IBEX, received a \$3,000 grant to support the continued development of his company. Drawing from firsthand experience working on steep-sloped roofs, Bishop is developing the S-RAD (Steep Roof Assist Device), an innovative platform that helps roofing contractors and insurance adjusters work more safely and efficiently by providing a stable, level surface on pitched roofs. The funding will help refine the company's early prototype as it advances toward commercialization.

"The preparation provided by everyone at STartUP Northshore and the IDEAInstitute is what helped drive this win," said Bishop. "Learning how to condense my vision for this product down to a five-minute pitch was a critical skill I gained from their coaching sessions. Winning THE LAUNCHPAD gets me one step closer to seeing this company blossom into what my vision has been all along."

Fellow finalists Marci Clines, Co-founder of IronRose Legacy Group, and Sarah Cooper Smith, Founder of Northshore Bath Co., each received \$1,000 grants.

The finalists were evaluated by a panel of highly respected judges from across Louisiana's innovation ecosystem. Each judge brought unique perspectives spanning entrepreneurship, investment, capital access, and community building. The panel included Jay Huffstatler, Executive Director of OnPath Foundation; Kelly A. Raney, Executive Director of Innovation Operations at Louisiana Innovation; and Lane Degenhardt, Co-founder and Chief Operating Officer of happycamp and winner of STartUP Northshore's 2025 NSpire Startup Slam.

Presented by OnPath Foundation, THE LAUNCHPAD provides early-stage entrepreneurs with individualized pitch coaching, community visibility, connections and startup funding designed to help advance their businesses. The competition is part of STartUP Northshore's broader entrepreneurial support ecosystem, which includes educational programming, mentorship, investor-readiness resources, and individualized founder support.

"At OnPath Foundation, one of our key pillars is connecting entrepreneurs with organizations like STartUP Northshore, and events like THE LAUNCHPAD so they can grow their business and invest in

the Northshore and other communities in southeast Louisiana” said Huffstatler. “We’re proud to partner with STartUP Northshore by providing the seed grants for these great businesses.”

Russell Richardson, President and CEO of St. Tammany Economic Development Corporation, expressed how the competition reflects the organization’s continued commitment to helping entrepreneurs transform promising ideas into sustainable businesses for the Northshore.

“Entrepreneurs play an important role in creating new opportunities and strengthening our economy,” Richardson said. “We are proud to congratulate IBEX and commend each of this year’s finalists for their intrepid vision. We look forward to seeing how they build on the momentum they’ve created through their participation in THE LAUNCHPAD.”

Each of THE LAUNCHPAD finalists participated in the Spring 2026 cohort of IDEAINSTITUTE Northshore. This 12-week hybrid accelerator is designed for early-stage entrepreneurs who are ready to level up. IDEAINSTITUTE provides the structure, support, and fundamentals to launch and grow with confidence. Applications are currently open for the Fall 2026 IDEAINSTITUTE Northshore cohort at startupnorthshore.com/idea-institute-northshore.

To learn more about STartUP Northshore and its programs for entrepreneurs and second-stage companies, visit startupnorthshore.com.

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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