



3-4-2019

## Fashion Startup Focused on Sustainability Wins WMU's Business Pitch Competition

College of Education and Human Development

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/familyconsumer-news>



Part of the Dietetics and Clinical Nutrition Commons, Education Commons, and the Fashion Design Commons

---

### WMU ScholarWorks Citation

College of Education and Human Development, "Fashion Startup Focused on Sustainability Wins WMU's Business Pitch Competition" (2019). *Family and Consumer Sciences News*. 44.  
<https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/familyconsumer-news/44>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Family and Consumer Sciences at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Family and Consumer Sciences News by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact [wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).



# Fashion startup focused on sustainability wins WMU's business pitch competition

Contact: Samantha Hooker

March 4, 2019



KALAMAZOO, Mich. — A clothing company focused on sustainable fashion won first place at Western Michigan University's seventh annual K.C. O'Shaughnessy Business Pitch Competition and Showcase held on campus **Feb. 15**.

**Rose Soma**, a junior from Traverse City, majoring in fashion design and development, claimed the top spot after making a pitch for her company Rose Soma: Up-Cycled Shirts.

Soma's company addresses the issue of the nearly 16 million tons of textile waste generated annually. The company's shirts are created using discarded textiles, which are cut up and reassembled, making each piece unique.

"Winning the pitch competition was unexpected," say Soma. "It's easy to have doubts as an entrepreneur and winning was encouraging and motivating. This summer I will be working strictly on my business, focusing on growth. Once I get my Etsy shop stocked with all new shirts and stickers, I'm planning on doing a marketing push using the funds from the pitch competition."

WMU's pitch competition serves as a test run for student entrepreneurs wanting to present their original business ideas to potential investors. During the event, participants compete for cash prizes while obtaining valuable feedback about what it would take to launch their innovative ideas. This year featured a high school division for the first time with eight student teams from local schools competing.

## 2019 TOP FINISHERS

---

Four companies won prizes totaling \$5,000 during this year's competition.

First place and a \$2,000 prize as well as the People's Choice Award and an additional \$300 prize went to Rose Soma: Up-Cycled Shirts, pitched by Soma.

Second place and a \$1,400 prize went to Gel Sleeves, a company pitched by junior **Conor Mulhearn**, an industrial and entrepreneurial engineering major from Jackson. His partners, sophomore **Megan Gesler**, from New Hudson, sophomore **Anthony Mastro**, from Oak Lawn, Illinois, and sophomore **Valentina Sanchez Briend**, from Argentina, are industrial and entrepreneurial engineering majors. The team hopes to enter the growing senior care market with their customizable arm and hand wraps which contain protective gel pockets for individuals who bruise easily due to the use of blood thinners.

Third place and an \$800 prize went to Rocket Race, a company pitched by sophomore **Benjamin Buell**, an industrial and entrepreneurial engineering major from Vicksburg. His partners, first year student **Robert Doran**, from Davisburg, and sophomore **Noah Franchak**, from White Lake, are also industrial and entrepreneurial engineering majors. Rocket Race appeals to the growing population of skateboarders. The company's stainless steel wheel bearing design eliminates rust and moisture damage preserving speed and greater bearing longevity.

Fourth place and a \$500 prize went to T-Tek, a company pitched by senior **Cortney York**, an industrial and entrepreneurial engineering major from Warren. Her partner, junior **Jasmine Fails**, is also an industrial and entrepreneurial engineer major from Westland. T-Tek hopes to cater to the food industry with a customizable trashcan that would eliminate issues caused by overloaded trash bags and leakage using a portable sensor and built-in springs.

## ABOUT THE COMPETITION

---

More than 31 individuals and teams participated in the 2019 K.C. O'Shaughnessy Business Pitch Competition, which honors student innovation and entrepreneurial spirit at WMU. Three-minute pitches for companies were evaluated during progressive rounds by panels of judges representing business community members and WMU faculty. Six companies made it to the final round.

"The pitch competition has continued to grow. We were excited to include the high school division this year alongside our talented WMU students," says **Robert Landeros**, chair of the Department of Management. "The presentations were incredibly strong, and it is a great opportunity to connect to entrepreneurs in our community."

The Department of Management in WMU's Haworth College of Business organizes and hosts the competition. More information, including videos of recent competition winners, is available [online](#).