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BRIAN PATRICK THOMAS AWARD

Amber Delgado, an industrial and entrepreneurial engineering major and Starting Gate participant from Allegan, Michigan, received the \$10,000 award for her invention, BlueBoards.

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ENTREPRENEUR, PH.D., MUSICIAN

Alumnus and serial entrepreneur Jason D'Mello took his dad's advice and became a professor. Along the way, he also launched multiple startups and, most recently, released a video with his band, Jenna Dean.

[READ D'MELLO'S STORY](#)



UNIQUE SUCCESS

Alexis Lenderman is among a select few Newman Civic Fellows to be named a scholarship winner by the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute.

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BE A TEAM PLAYER

In a recent post on Alumni Unscripted, Shane Rodgers, M.S.A.'02, discusses being the ideal team player.

[READ THE POST](#)

- Interested in blogging about your experience and sharing it with other young alumni? Consider writing for Alumni Unscripted, a blog for recent alumni from the Haworth College of Business Young Alumni Advisory Board. [Contact the board and let them know!](#)
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Editor: Cindy Wagner
cindy.wagner@wmich.edu
(269) 387-5928



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WMU entrepreneur wins Brian Patrick Thomas Award

contact: Stacey Markin
May 2, 2017 | WMU News

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—The student entrepreneur behind a device that provides a portable workspace when working with blueprints and other large documents is the recipient of the third annual Brian Patrick Thomas Entrepreneurial Spirit Award.

Amber Delgado, an industrial and entrepreneurial engineering major from Allegan, received the \$10,000 award for her invention, BlueBoards, which creates a work surface that allows architects and others to work with large prints in the field.



Delgado

BlueBoards

Delgado's invention was born out of her own experience while she was interning at Perrigo and needed to write on blueprints and other plans when she was working on projects in the plants. Without a work surface, the prints were awkward to hold and difficult to write on, resulting in crumpled plans and sloppy writing. When Delgado went to research a solution that kept plans organized and provided a hard-writing surface, she found that there were no good, affordable options on the market. Surprised, she began doing further research and decided that this was a problem she could tackle.

"I became inspired by the idea that I could create something that would be useful to others," says Delgado. To date, her major accomplishments have included:

- Interviewing 50 potential customers regarding consumer needs local to Kalamazoo.
- Creating several prototype iterations.
- Gaining mentorship through Kzoo Makers.
- Developing a business canvas and plan.
- Filing for a provisional patent.

Delgado's immediate plans are to use half of the award monies to produce 50 prototypes and get these out to her customer test list. She will also purchase a Kzoo Makers membership.

"The Starting Gate program has given me so many opportunities, and now with this financial backing, I can move my business even further down the path to success," says Delgado. "Starting Gate has already taught me the art of business planning, connected me with several local entrepreneurs, and helped me gain the confidence to pitch my idea to any investor or customer. This award gives me the power to make financial decisions for my business while also finding opportunities to choose transactions that will benefit the Kalamazoo community. I am so grateful for Starting Gate and to Brian Thomas for his support of WMU entrepreneurs.

Brian Patrick Thomas

Thomas is an alumnus of WMU who earned his degree in industrial marketing in 1996. He began his professional career at Forkardt Inc. in Portage and later became an account executive manager for Honda Manufacturing at global automotive giant Magna International. He joined OtterBox in 2003 and was eventually named CEO where he was responsible for leading global expansion efforts and was the chief visionary in positioning OtterBox as an innovation technology company.

During his tenure, Thomas grew the company from \$2 million in revenue to over a \$1 billion multinational industry powerhouse. OtterBox achieved several milestones and was consistently named one of the fastest growing and most innovative companies in the U.S. by several business organizations. Thomas received the Mid-Market CEO of the Year in 2014 by CEO Connection and was named one of the Top 100 CEOs in the country by Chief Executive Magazine.

Thomas' passion for entrepreneurial thinking and social entrepreneurship sparked his desire to establish this award to support student entrepreneurs in their efforts to create enterprises that operate harmoniously with employees, communities and non-profit organizations, creating a strong synergistic benefit for all stakeholders

Thomas is currently on the board of directors for Jemez Technology. Jemez Technology is a software company focusing on real-time perimeter detection and security for the country's critical infrastructure, monuments and national security assets. Thomas is currently an angel investor, mentor, and growth strategist for more than 14 startups.

About the award

The Brian Patrick Thomas Entrepreneurial Spirit Award is awarded annually to a company in Starting Gate, WMU's student business accelerator, which seeks to move teams of people to a common cause with a higher social purpose.

About Starting Gate

Starting Gate is a student business accelerator that gives students rich and valuable resources to develop their startup companies. It is located in downtown Kalamazoo and operated by the Haworth College of Business Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. The accelerator is open to all WMU students through a competitive application process in which students must demonstrate a promising idea for a product or service, which can be launched within a short period of time. Starting Gate provides a fast track to business launch.

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Newman Civic Fellow from WMU receives additional honor

contact: Jeanne Baron

May 4, 2017 | WMU News

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—In April, a triple major from Western Michigan University who has devoted countless hours to community engagement and service was named a 2017 Newman Civic Fellow and in May, she was named a Leadership and the American Presidency scholarship winner.

Senior **Alexis Lenderman**, of Oxford, is one of 273 students who were selected as fellows from higher education institutions in 39 states and Washington, D.C., that are members of Campus Compact. Presidents and chancellors of the compact's member institutions annually nominate one community-committed student from their schools for the one-year Newman fellowship. Nominees are individuals who have demonstrated an investment in finding solutions for challenges facing communities throughout the country and abroad.

Lenderman is one of only five 2017 fellows to also receive a scholarship from the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute's fall 2017 Leadership and the American Presidency program. The program is designed to develop the next generation of citizen leaders and selects its scholarship winners from Newman Civic Fellows for their demonstrated commitment to public service and civic engagement.



Alexis Lenderman

Alexis Lenderman

Lenderman is majoring in entrepreneurship, food service administration and global international studies and minoring in nonprofit leadership. She has been a part of 10 different student organizations, all of which are centered on using business or entrepreneurship to bring about positive change.

"Alexis Lenderman...is a committed student regularly engaging in anything that gives her the opportunity to bring about equality for all people," WMU President John M. Dunn wrote in nominating her for the fellowship. "She is regularly advocating for change by joining in on events and/or creating her own. Alexis is constantly thinking of ways to change the world around her, and she is quick to act on many of them."

A former foster-care youth, Lenderman received a scholarship from WMU's Seita Scholars Program, which goes to students at the University who have experienced foster care in their teen years. And she subsequently has worked closely with the program to bring awareness and help to other foster-care youth.

"As a first-generation college student who aged out of the foster care system, I have seen the power of advocacy on behalf of marginalized populations firsthand," Lenderman wrote in a personal statement associated with the fellowship. "I spent years feeling as if I did not have a voice, so I am determined to use my voice to address social issues affecting those that have also felt unheard."

Understanding that social change does not happen alone, she has initiated several campus projects and activities to assist or better inform her fellow students. In addition, she routinely takes advantage of opportunities to support positive social change, such as by attending Black Lives Matter teach-ins, advocacy summits and Model United Nations conferences.

"I am also passionate about worldwide change. I have studied abroad five different times, and I serve as a [WMU] Study Abroad alumni ambassador to make others aware of the opportunity," Lenderman wrote. "Through this experience, I realized that finances can present a barrier to students receiving the best education they can. As a result, I created a business called The Scholarship Expert, where I assist students in accessing needed funds."

To learn more about Lenderman, visit compact.org/newman-civic-fellow.

Newman Civic Fellowship

Campus Compact is a national coalition of more than 1,000 colleges and universities. The organization advances the public purposes of its members by deepening their ability to improve community life and to educate students for civic and social responsibility. Its Newman Civic Fellowship provides a variety of learning and networking opportunities to students as well as pathways to exclusive scholarship and postgraduate opportunities.

Leadership and the American Presidency program

The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to the promotion of individual liberty, economic opportunity, global democracy, and national pride. It sustains the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, the Center for Public Affairs, the Presidential Learning Center and The Air Force One Pavilion.

That organization's Leadership and the American Presidency program provides an accredited course grounded in real history where students critically examine the leadership journeys of presidents in relation to their own lives. Students hear from leaders in the fields of business, government and the nonprofit sectors, learning lessons on leadership while simultaneously applying all of their skills in the real world in an internship setting and in authentic course assignments.

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President Ronald Reagan