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Contra Costa Shark Tank lures young entrepreneurs to swim with the big fish

By Vera Kochan



Photo Courtesy Contra Costa Shark Tank

Front row (from left): Contra Costa Shark Tank Founder Maya Hammerman, second-place winner Ronen Jain, third-place winner Archit Kundu, and first-place winner Fatimah Hussain

Every great invention starts with a good idea, and the Contra Costa Shark Tank Youth Competition was designed to encourage young entrepreneurs to realize and market those good ideas.

The Campolindo High School Entrepreneurship Club organized the first ever event as a way to help students in grades kindergarten through 12th learn important life skills, such as perseverance, self-confidence, and financial literacy.

"The best way to learn about entrepreneurship is by starting a business," stated Campo junior and competition founder Maya Hammerman. "My journey as an entrepreneur started in elementary school. We want to inspire kids in Contra Costa County to start or grow any type of business from traditional ones, such as lemonade stands and babysitting, to innovative new products or services that they create."

The competition began in September 2023, when applications were open for submission. Approximately 300 students hoped to be considered for one of the 10 finalist spots, where they would present a three-minute Finalist Pitch during the Feb. 6 event at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

The judges included Hammerman, who is also Campo's Entrepreneurship Club's president and a businesswoman in her own right as the founder of Moon Blossom Collection. Other judges were Jason Gardner (Founder of

Marqeta), Stephanie Williams (CFO and Controller of Pacific Gas & Electric Company), Roxanne Christophe (Founder and CEO of Girls Crushing It), and Anthony Marino (President of ThredUp).

The finalists were judged on four criteria: 1) Enthusiasm for entrepreneurship, 2) How the business was presented, 3) Viability of the business, and 4) How the prize money will be used to launch a new business or grow an existing one.

Up first was SportzCity by Hunter Smith (5th grade, Burton Valley Elementary, from Lafayette). His product is sports cards (like baseball cards) of sports-related, laminated photos of friends, family, or teammates.

Experimental Kids by Archit Kundu (5th grade, Bella Vista Elementary, from San Ramon). His product is science kits (lava lamp or crystal growing) at reasonable prices without the toxic ingredients.

Lydia's Soap by Lydia Stewart (7th grade, Virtuous Voices Christian Academy, from Antioch). Her product is hand-made soaps with bath time toys inside (rubber ducks, small cars, etc.).

Loonies by Valerie Castellanos, Angie Alvarenga, Giovanni Perez, and Savannah Johnston (7th grade, Summit Tamalpais, from Richmond). Their product involves washable glass water bottles with straws and attachable stickers.

Tied Up in a Bow by Himna Imam and Mahum Malik (9th

grade, Venture and Dougherty Valley, from San Ramon). Their products are themed gift baskets that can also be personalized.

ElderSafe by Ronen Jain (10th grade, Monte Vista High, from Danville). His mobile app for seniors allows them to identify hazards in the home and prioritizes a list of deliverable safety products.

MiracleAlgae by Nicholas Angel-Ordonez and Shashank Konini (11th grade, San Ramon Valley, from Danville). Their product, a type of spirulina, thrives in high carbon environments, and when it dries contains more than 60% protein that can be used in yogurts and smoothies.

Synchroma Studio by Hector Espinoza (12th grade, Freedom High, from Oakley). His software program helps live performance venues to organize all of their electrical needs, such as lighting and sound.

ScrubWoofer™ by Beatrice Roberge (12th grade, Campolindo High, from Lafayette). Her product contains fine bristles that when used with canine toothpaste helps dogs to keep their tongues and teeth clean while they lick.

Workout Wizard by Fatimah Hussain (12th grade, Dougherty Valley High, from San Ramon). Her at-home workout software allows users to choose their own exercise routine and then receive specific feedback as to the routine's effectiveness.

The third-place prize of \$250 was awarded to

Experimental Kids. "Contra Costa Shark Tank is a great opportunity, and winning third place gives me the confidence to take this business to the next level and make STEM learning fun for all the kids 5 - 12 years old," said Kundu. "Also, it was a learning experience to present my views in front of such great judges and such a large audience."

The second-place prize of \$500 was awarded to ElderSafe. "I'm beyond thrilled to be one of the winners of this competition after the countless hours I've spent perfecting my app," stated Jain. "It was super exciting to get direct feedback from the judges and attendees about my business and how they would use it."

The first-place prize of \$1,000 was awarded to Workout Wizard. "From the moment I got the finalist letter to the day I presented on the Contra Costa Shark Tank's stage, the entrepreneurship journey has been extremely rewarding," commented Hussain. "To

win the first-place prize is a dream come true, and I hope to continue inspiring fellow youth entrepreneurs to follow

their passions and never give up. The best time to build a business is now, so what are you waiting for?"

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