

IN THE NEWS

July 14, 2023
by Emily Scarlett ABC13 WZZM



\$5,000 top prize offered in Black business competition

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — You still have until the end of the day, Friday,

July 14 to submit your application for Pitch Black, a competition for Black business owners. The idea is to help them improve and sustain their companies with a little extra guidance.

How would you like a rich, pecan cake with a homemade pecan butter and cheesecake pudding in the middle, as well as toasted pecans and caramel sauce? Amanda Price, owner of Amanda's Frosted Dreams, likes to ask her customers, "What are your taste buds craving?"

That's because at her company, she says, "If you can dream it, I can bake it."

She's one of the winners from the very first Pitch Black event, which focused on Black-owned businesses in Muskegon County. This time, they'll be in Kent County.

"The goal is to increase the chances of success of Black-owned businesses throughout West Michigan," said Ed Garner, the West Michigan regional manager of the Michigan Small Business Development Center (MI-SBDC).

The inaugural Pitch Black event was in 2021 and was created by the MI-SBDC in response to the pandemic and its effects on small businesses, particularly Black-owned businesses.

"Nationally, there's a statistic that said at least like 41% may have had to close temporarily as opposed to 17% non-minority businesses," said Garner.

20 contestants will be chosen to go through a six-week training.

Garner said the program was designed specifically "to help those [businesses] stay in business, help

them improve their business acumen and continue to strengthen their businesses along the way."

Seven finalists will then be chosen to pitch their business to a live audience and panel of judges on Sept. 28.

This may remind you of a popular reality TV competition, and Garner agrees, saying it's "something similar but it's more entertaining than, I'd say, of 'Shark Tank.'"

He said, think a little more old school.

"You may think of 'Showtime at the Apollo,'" said Garner, although, he said this crowd is much nicer.

"The audience doesn't boo or anything. The audience supports these folks."

The top three businesses selected by the judges will receive cash prizes.

"Top prize will be \$5,000 and the second prize will be \$3,500 and third prize will be \$1,500," said Garner. Not to mention, the business owners will also receive invaluable support and continued mentorship.

"How to apply for the loans, how to lay out a business plan and so those are the things that you'll need and once you have at least that lineup, you feel more comfortable going forth," said Price, who added that Pitch Black has "helped us expand greatly."

It's helped her grow what used to solely be a home business into a new pop-up Chalet as part of Muskegon's Western Market.

Applications for Pitch Black are due Friday night, "11:59, a minute before midnight," said Garner.

Pitch Black is part of the Uplift Michigan initiative, which works to provide access to all entrepreneurs throughout Michigan.