

Bay City entrepreneurs pitch their dreams to a panel of judges in hopes of winning \$5,000

KATHY ROBERTS | THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2023

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A pitch competition designed to foster small business prosperity and economic growth opportunities within Bay County's entrepreneurship community.

Graphic courtesy of Business by the Bay: Pitch Your Future

The [Business by the Bay: Pitch Your Future](#) contest on Wednesday night ended with a princess and a hound winning \$3,750 to build a mobile pet grooming business.

The final part of the Business By the Bay Competition – supported by Bay Future, Michigan Small Business Development Center, Huntington Bank, Bay County Growth Alliance, and Wildfire Credit Union – was held at the State Theatre.

Initially, 11 different businesses entered the Pitch Your Future competition, spending months with advisers and consultants to hone business plans and a presentation.

Earlier rounds narrowed the field to five finalists. Those finalists won the chance to present their dreams to four judges - Chris Girard from Bay County Growth Alliance; Larry Henderson, from Huntington Bank; Joe Sasiela from Wildfire Credit Union; and Courtney Garrett from CMU Research Corp.



Graphic courtesy of Business by the Bay: Pitch Your Future

The judges awarded \$10,000 in prizes to the top three presenters on Wednesday. In addition, audience members could buy \$5 ballots to choose their favorite business. Whoever won the audience vote got the money from the sale of the ballots.

The presenters, and their prizes included:

Princess and the Hound

Jena Monville, from [Princess and the Hound](#) mobile pet grooming salon, walked away with both the top \$5,000 prize from the judges and \$250 for the audience.

In Monville's pitch, she said she plans to open her business in January. She expects to use the prize money to design and wrap her mobile trailer to advertise her business. She'll also buy equipment such as a wall mount for propane gas and an electric lift table for larger dogs.

Monville explained to the judges that grooming is vital to the health of pets. Her mobile salon solves several problems for families that want their dogs professionally groomed. First, many dogs don't do well with others. Some find travel difficult.

When the groomer comes to the home, though, those problems disappear.

"We all want the best for our pets, so I put protocols in place to be sure the salon is a safe, clean, and stress-free environment," she says.

LoLoBee's Lounge

The second-place winner, [LoLoBee's Lounge](#) at 106 S. Linn St., won \$3,500 from the judges.

In their pitch on Wednesday, owners Lauren Williams and Benjamin Paul told the judges they planned to use the prize money to buy neon signs. The business is located just off Midland Street, near bars and eateries. The goal is to draw people to the coffee and tea shop for a non-alcoholic end to the evening.

Paul says they have expanded the coffee and tea lounge far beyond serving beverages. They filled the walls with artwork from local artists. They've invited in musicians. They host trivia nights, live music, karaoke, and special events.

All that work has led to growth. Paul told the judges that LoLoBee's has seen between 2.5% and 3% month-over-month increases in gross revenue. They've invested all their profits back into the business.

What they need now is to promote themselves within the community. They rely primarily on word of mouth and social media to attract new customers now. Neon signs, though, could help visitors to Midland Street establishments discover the lounge.

Bayside Buggies

Coming in third place, and winning \$1,500, was [Bayside Buggies](#).

Cory Christopher, owner, founder and operator of Bayside Buggies, told the judges he hoped to use prize money to cover the expenses of purchasing and installing electric hub motors on the five pedicabs in his fleet.

Christopher's company, which opened in 2023, operates five pedicabs, or "buggies," in Downtown Bay City, Uptown, and near the Midland Street Business District.

Christopher says his business solves problems for the community.

Bay City doesn't have an abundance of touring services for small groups. Large bus tours are available, but [Bayside Buggies](#) offers two-person cabs.

Those large bus tours also often require long lead times. Bayside Buggies is available by simply hailing a cab.

Finally, large tour buses can be costly. Christopher charges \$1 per minute, per person, for his rides.

If he expands, Christopher envisions offering shuttle services during community events.

Looking ahead, Christopher says he is talking to organizations in nearby communities about expanding into those areas.

Two other businesses also made it to the final round on Wednesday night and presented their visions to the judges and audience.

Calypso Wine Bar

Kassidy Fifer, founder and owner of the soon-to-open wine bar in Downtown Bay City, presented a plan for developing an outdoor space near her business, Calypso Wine Bar.

Fifer, who hopes to open the wine bar on Fifth Street next spring, told the judges she thinks Calypso Wine Bar fills a need in the community. Bay City has many popular bars and restaurants for people to gather. But those places tend to be loud, crowded, and the staff aren't always knowledgeable about wine.

"There's a lot of competition in Bay City," Fifer adds. "There are a lot of bars and a lot of restaurants and they're a lot of fun." But those bars and restaurants aren't always a good setting to gather with friends or family to enjoy a quiet glass of wine.

Her planned Fifth Street location puts her business within easy walking distance as many boutiques. Fifer says she may incentivize shopping by offering a break on the price of a glass of wine for people who produce a receipt from a local store.

"Our target market is women 21 to 34 years old. That's the same as the boutiques. Those people already are coming to Bay City to shop. Now they'll be coming to Bay City to drink wine."

Bay City Boat Rental

[Bay City Boat Rental](#) asked the judges for the prize money to pay for a boat slip, pre-season tune-up, supplies, and marketing support.

Owner Jared Greshaw told the judges that owning a boat costs about \$6,500 a year. That doesn't include buying the boat itself. Boats also cost their owners elbow grease with the ongoing need for maintenance work.

"What if I were to tell you that there is one inexpensive type of boat that requires no maintenance? That is somebody else's boat. We're here to be somebody else's boat," Greshaw said.

Boat rental options do exist in Michigan, but they're either miles away or cost more than what Bay City Boat Rental proposes. Bay City Boat Rental consists of one, 17-person pontoon docked at [Scotty's Sandbar](#), 120 Evergreen Drive. The rental rate is \$250 (plus fees) for a four-hour tour and \$410 (plus fees) for an eight-hour rental.

Greshaw says he already has four confirmed rentals for next summer.

Choosing a winner couldn't have been easy. Chris Vieau, Regional Director for the [Michigan Small Business Development Center](#), praised all the presenters.

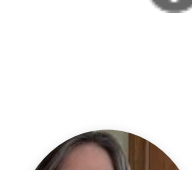
"They were all great presentations," Vieau said. "This was first class."

Michelle Judd, SBDC Contract Business Consultant for Bay County, said the hope is for the event to become an annual one.

"Our inaugural pool of Business by the Bay: Pitch Your Future candidates has proven to be a savvy and well-rounded group of individuals," Judd said. "Participants supported each other by exchanging helpful tips and offering feedback on their respective business plans during our training sessions. Every one of these start-ups has a bright future."

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Read more articles by [Kathy Roberts](#).

Kathy Roberts, a graduate of Central Michigan University, moved to Bay City in 1987 for 15 years in the newspaper industry. She was a reporter and editor at the Bay City Times for a year before leaving to work at the Bay Area Chamber of Commerce, Covenant HealthCare, and Ohio Design. In 2019, she returned to her storytelling roots as the Managing Editor of Route Bay City. When she's not editing or writing stories, you can find her reading books, knitting, or visiting the bars of Bay County. You can reach Kathy at editor@RouteBayCity.com

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