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First 'HYPE' event awards young entrepreneurs, fuels creativity & dreams in business

by MoodyOnTheMarket.com(https://www.moodyonthemarket.com/author/golson/) |
November 22, 2024(https://www.moodyonthemarket.com/2024/11/22/) |
What's Happening (https://www.moodyonthemarket.com/category/whats-happening/)



Southwest Michigan's brightest young entrepreneurial talent gathered at the Watermark Solarium in Stevensville for the debut of HYPE – Highlighting Young Professional Excellence. Hosted by the Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber in partnership with the Emerge Innovation Hub, this new event provided a unique platform for aspiring entrepreneurs to present their ideas and compete for significant cash prizes and in-kind support to launch or grow their businesses.

The evening began with an panel discussion featuring successful young entrepreneurs, including Aiyenede Akhigbe (*Sticky Spoons Jam, LLC*), Chris Mason (*Watermark Brewing Company*), Stephanie Ott (*Base Bowls & Company*), and Dustin Lester (*Pipestone Indoor Country Club* and *Pipestone Creek Golf Course*). These panelists shared their entrepreneurial journeys, offered valuable insights, and later served as judges for the pitch competition.

The competition itself featured seven contestants, with awards going to the top three, plus a special Crowd Favorite Award chosen by live audience voting. The winners were:

- 1st Place (\$15,000): *Zo's Mini Donuts*, Zoey and Lydia Heyn, Sawyer;
- 2nd Place (\$10,000): *Willowbrook Farms*, Vanessa Frias, Cassopolis;
- 3rd Place (\$5,000): *Muddy Puddles Preschool*, Angela and Ricky Rhodes, Stevensville; and
- Crowd Favorite (\$2,500): *Hyde's Lifestyle Taekwondo*, James Hyde, St. Joseph.

Additional contestants included Ezekiel-Wheels of Berrien Springs, Bare Naked Salts and Soaps of Niles, and Paige Solutions, LLC of St. Joseph.

"Supporting young entrepreneurs is central to our mission of driving economic growth and innovation in Southwest Michigan," said Arthur Havlicek, President & CEO of the Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber. "This makes HYPE more than a competition—it's an investment in the visionaries who will lead our region into the future, and we're proud to provide them with the resources and opportunities they need to succeed."

All told, the event awarded over \$65,000 in combined cash prizes and additional opportunities, made possible by the generous support of title sponsors Frederick S. Upton Foundation and Whirlpool Foundation, along with Horizon Bank, Chi Ishobak, Sturgis Bank, Berecz & Associates, Silver Beach Pizza, Mid-West Family Southwest Michigan, WAUS 90.7 FM, Watermark Brewing Company, Andrews University Office of Innovation & Entrepreneurship, Michigan SBDC, SCORE of Kalamazoo / Southwest Michigan, and Strauss Training.

In a surprise announcement, Chi Ishobak revealed that all winners would also be eligible for additional funding through their Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), effectively increasing their award amounts and providing even greater resources for their entrepreneurial endeavors.

"HYPE showcased the incredible entrepreneurial talent and innovation thriving in Southwest Michigan," added Jasmine Hansen, Member Engagement Manager and program lead for HYPE. "We are so proud of our top three winners and crowd favorite for their hard work, creativity, and passion—they truly embody what this event is all about. Together, we've ignited a spark that will continue to inspire and shape the future of our business community."

By bringing together aspiring entrepreneurs, seasoned business leaders, and supportive community partners, the SMR Chamber said that HYPE highlighted the importance of collaboration in driving economic progress. The inaugural event sets a strong foundation for future efforts to champion entrepreneurship and sustain growth across Southwest Michigan.

For more information about HYPE or the Chamber's initiatives, visit www.smrchamber.com (https://ccyp7jwab.cc.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001FW6txZYiTXRIUSW-IfvNZKrBPOrA5DtAaBWrJ-FRBkFfzsNy0DWTdU7qfHqRKYyXV2CX8eqCC2E-an1syTYVmkioS2xNkRY2oZxbEPIgXNHAL2NliDxmGDKGYjNWZGusWlzETyQc3Q4wSNpAwBJ9Tuus3-Tak9V&c=Rbrl7Y4yCKITagpQ0uyMk7yncYrG0nqF_m1K9H_gRPhzM0g2qgs6ww==&ch=0FQIx4XuNhoXk)

About Zo's Mini Donuts: Lydia & Zoey are the sweet sisters behind Zo's Mini Donuts. Together they make a dynamic duo with a shared goal: to share the magic that is Zo's Mini Donuts with the world. Zo's Mini Donuts is your go-to donut shop- dedicated to serving fresh delicious donuts at an affordable price. To keep it sweet & simple (just like their menu), it's all about good treats & good times for everyone. #meetme@zos <https://zos-mini-donuts.square.site> (https://ccyp7jwab.cc.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001FW6txZYiTXRIUSW-IfvNZKrBPOrA5DtAaBWrJ-FRBkFfzsNy0DWTd1KV5uIN4M-pbr-TbLL6QYO_IOXRt8hTINMSuhu1PK84didw2EcFdK7gnV2PiZc-HUK9LU5ta81tXI0R9rMmsveCQIGDkxB24AaANQu9Zg0h4SaxDUVAIY=&c=Rbrl7Y4yCKITagpQ0uyMk7yn)

About Willowbrook Farms: Vanessa and Juan, first-generation farmers and owners of Willowbrook Farms in Cassopolis, Michigan, are pioneering a new vision for agriculture. At this small, family-run farm, sustainable practices and community engagement are at the heart of everything they do. Committed to nurturing the land and promoting animal welfare, Willowbrook Farms raises meat chickens, laying hens, pork, goats, and lamb in a humane and natural environment, using non-GMO and antibiotic-free methods. <https://www.willowbrookmi.com> (https://ccyp7jwab.cc.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001FW6txZYiTXRIUSW-IfvNZKrBPOrA5DtAaBWrJ-FRBkFfzsNy0DWTd1KV5uIN4M-ErWVuaqgEnNXuLn85sdYyX0HwQBIMwZnrGLXsDpmzqBYtNN-GjklvZkBBdpfh4311NBrAFnAoofoJLxsxeT8oOil01GpiMov&c=Rbrl7Y4yCKITagpQ0uyMk7yncYrG0nqF_m11)

About Muddy Puddles Preschool: Angela & Ricky Rhodes come from backgrounds in public education. With degrees in school social work and special education, they are passionate about getting their students outside, developing social emotional skills, and promoting engaging, messy, hands-on play. They founded Muddy Puddles Preschool in 2020 as a small, family run program in

Stevensville, MI. No matter the weather, they spend at least 50% of our day outside and focus on child-led free play and you will often find their teachers and students collaborating to create mud pies, building forts, and having dance parties. <https://www.muddypuddlespreschool.com> (https://ccyp7jwab.cc.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001FW6txZYiTXRIUSW-IfvNZKrbPOrA5DtAaBWrJ-FRBkFfzsNy0DWTd1KV5uIN4M-t8FTbc_-xflby2aLRQkFGViO3cm-b_iYAbHwayx6KzP7Qo3gEbRxQmbBGMOfucVG4veyJl6LTD9MM55xXI4YsYTERlrgHep2CeSvuZsHXQ=&c)

About Hyde's Lifestyle Taekwondo: James Hyde is a 4th Degree Taekwondo Master and the founder of Hyde's Lifestyle Taekwondo, based in Benton Harbor, Michigan. He is passionate about teaching Taekwondo to those eager to learn, focusing on student excellence and helping students realize their fullest potential. At Hyde's Lifestyle Taekwondo, students are encouraged to live by the martial artist's oath each day, embracing values such as courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control, and an indomitable spirit. James takes pride in guiding the community's youth toward positive development through martial arts training. <https://www.facebook.com/p/Hydes-Lifestyle-Taekwondo-100063966347603/> (https://ccyp7jwab.cc.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001FW6txZYiTXRIUSW-IfvNZKrbPOrA5DtAaBWrJ-FRBkFfzsNy0DWTd1KV5uIN4M-QplB_d7h0jEH_OBu9klHnxy6turcvyERjgvepKw_QnJPHMWPPpwjflud5V5Pp2eS8ViL0GsMEMkue3NxtHuAGHKPWqYObLgiiF0kLxt01w_uMqE39a28ilaU_6Elv4e5edAODVmg==&c=Rbrl7Y4yCKITagpQ0uyMk7yncYr)

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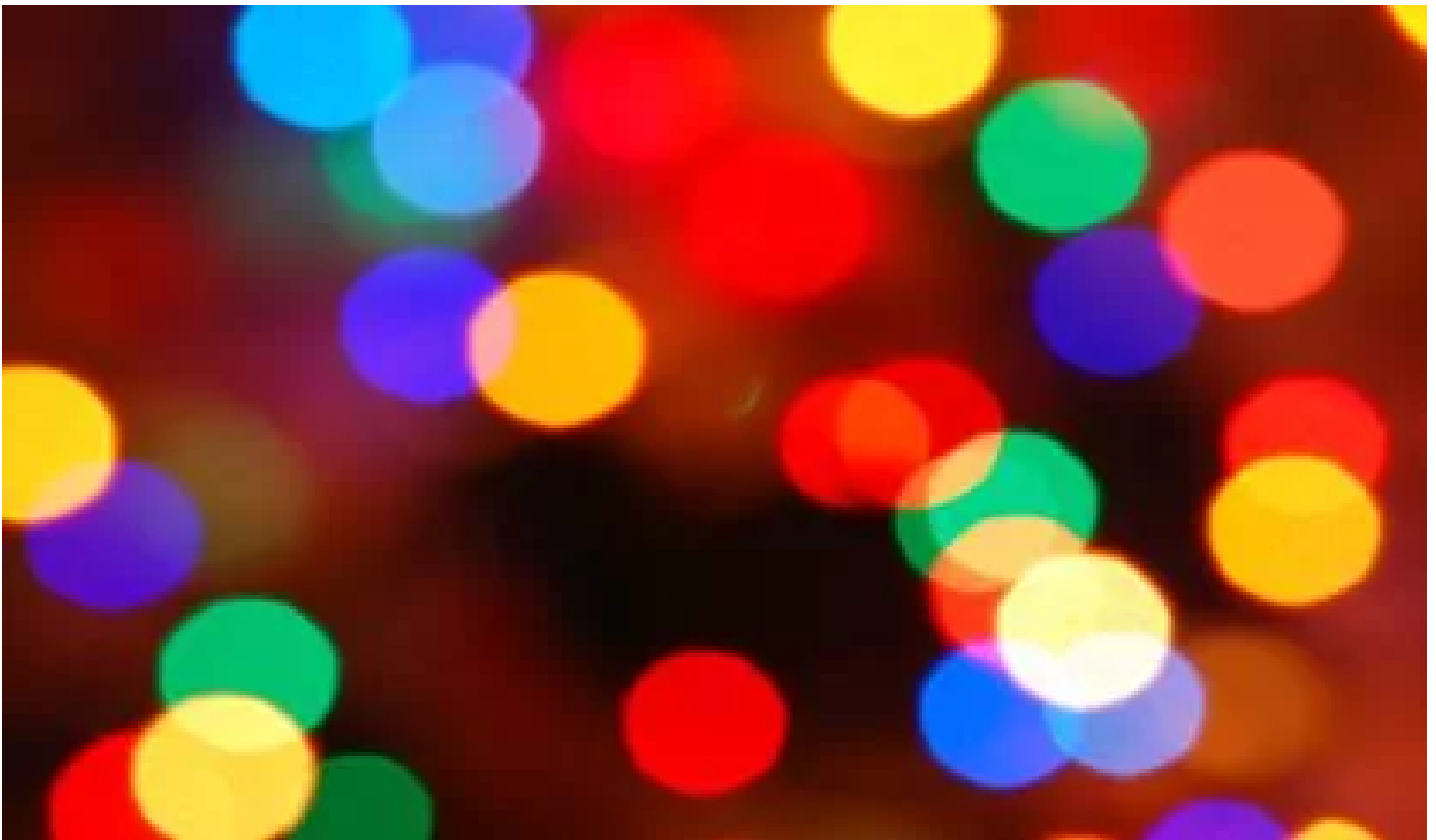


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