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USF St. Petersburg Entrepreneurship Club students dominate pitch competition

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Evan Koteles

USF St. Petersburg Entrepreneurship Club students dominated a southeastern pitch competition in Tampa last week, with four of the seven finalists and a first and third place showing.

More than 200 entrepreneurship students from throughout the Southeast attended the Southeast Entrepreneurship Conference Student Pitch Competition at the University of Tampa Feb. 1-2. The universities represented included the University of Florida, Mississippi State University,

Texas Christian University, the University of Tennessee Chattanooga and the University of Tampa.

Senior Entrepreneurship major Evan Koteles won the \$2,000 first place prize with the Spunnel, a combination spoon and funnel that [put him in third place](#) in last year's competition.

Nick Price, a senior majoring in Information Systems Management, placed third with his pitch for a mobile, waterless car cleaning business.

"This was the best overall showing of pitching skills by our students I have seen," said William Jackson, Ph.D., director of the [Entrepreneurship Program](#) in the USF St. Petersburg College of Business. "I am so proud of each and every student that participated — it was absolutely amazing."

The students' success comes less than a month after the Entrepreneurship Program was named the Outstanding Emerging Entrepreneurship Program in the United States by the United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

The students were coached by Nathan Schwagler, the Entrepreneurship Club Advisor and creative-in-Residence; Daniel James Scott, Associate Director of the Entrepreneurship Program; John Morrow, Entrepreneur-in-Residence; and Elizabeth Markie, Entrepreneurship Program Pitch Coach. The students who competed are members of the USFSP Entrepreneurship Club, which is sponsored by [Wells Fargo](#).



Nick Price

Koteles said he has spent the last year refining his Spunnel with engineers and developing prototypes. "After pitching a few weeks ago at a practice competition at USFSP, the judges gave it to me straight that I was going to have to show a year's worth of traction if I was going to pitch the same idea as last year," he said. "Within 24 hours I was taking it to restaurant servers, managers, owners and executive chefs to get their feedback." They told him they thought it would be a useful kitchen tool.

A singer-songwriter, Koteles even wrote a short song about the Spunnel that used in his pitch. "I didn't want to leave anything on the table," he said. "I seriously fought back tears when I heard my name. I'm more motivated than ever to justify the recognition and see the Spunnel on shelves and in kitchens."

Next up: to get manufacturing quotes and attend the International Home Show in Chicago.

Price developed his idea for a mobile, eco-friendly waterless car cleaning business as a project in the a venture creation class in Entrepreneurship. He launched the business last month with marketing and web development assistance from two USFSP graduates.

CitySleekers sends workers on bicycles to customers “wherever they are,” Price explained. “Going into the competition, I was so nervous, I was only given four days notice for the qualifying round, and finally pieced together my pitch the day of the event. After I won the qualifying round, I just practiced and practiced until I knew it like the back of my hand. I was shocked when I won third place, all the other pitches were so good!” He is seeking partnerships to expand to other cities.

The Entrepreneurship Program is seeking [support for students and faculty to compete in future competitions](#). If you are interested in learning more about supporting the University please contact Alexis Searfoss, Assistant Director of Development, at 727-873-4519 or asearfoss@usfsp.edu.

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