



THE DAYTONA BEACH NEWS-JOURNAL

Startup Weekend: Event aims to encourage entrepreneurship, create sense of community

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By Clayton Parkclayton.park@news-jrnl.com

DAYTONA BEACH - The Volusia-Flagler area has seen a number of business rags-to-riches stories over the years, ventures begun in a spare bedroom, garage, or in the case of Hawaiian Tropic, the back of a pickup truck, that grew to become multimillion-dollar companies.

Despite those successes, the area is not generally thought of as an entrepreneurial hotbed like places such as California's Silicon Valley or Boulder, Colorado.

A group of locals are organizing an event later this month they hope will be a step toward changing that perception.

The Nov. 13-15 event, Startup Weekend, is being described as a 54-hour crash course in how to launch a business.

The event, at the Henderson Welcome Center at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, invites people to learn how to pitch an idea for a business and become part of a team that develops a business plan on how to bring that product or service to market, including conducting market research to determine its feasibility. At the conclusion of the weekend, each team will make a presentation before a panel of judges made up of local business experts with the winning team receiving a free year of services and space at the Volusia County-funded UCF Business Incubator at Daytona Beach International Airport.

The Startup Weekend in Daytona Beach is one of several being held around the world, some of which will take place over the same three days.

CareerSource Flagler Volusia, Volusia County's Economic Development Division, Embry-Riddle and Daytona Hyundai are the sponsors for the local event.

Some of the organizers of the local Startup Weekend event recently spoke with The News-Journal.

"Volusia County can become a hot spot for technology and innovation," said Jayson Meyer, founder and CEO of Synergy Billing in Daytona Beach, who will deliver the event's opening keynote speech.

Meyer, who began his first business 18 years ago at age 15, said while he has enjoyed success as an entrepreneur, "I made so many mistakes in the beginning. I didn't have a lot of guidance. I was really looking for mentors."

Art Zimmet, a business consultant with the Small Business Development Center at Daytona State College, said startups stand a better chance for success if they can receive advice and feedback from business mentors as well as other small business owners.

"You learn power by getting other people's ideas," added Dave Spitzer, a staff research engineer at Embry-Riddle who leads the university's Center for Motorsports Engineering and is also a business consultant.

Events such as Startup Weekend and the weekly 1 Million Cups entrepreneurs forum in Daytona Beach are ways of providing those connections, he said.

Jack White, a partner in White Challis Redevelopment, agreed. "The biggest thing is connecting local people," he said, noting that establishing a strong support network for entrepreneurs can also help to stop the area's chronic "brain drain" of homegrown talent leaving for better career opportunities elsewhere.