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Two potential businesses win honors in UPA contest

University Park Alliance to award entrepreneurs with money, assistance

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A fine art printmaking studio and gallery and a state-of-the-art indoor climbing facility have earned top honors among six finalists in the University Park Alliance (UPA) Start UP! Business Plan Competition.

A panel of judges and advisory board members from the community picked the winners, Rubber City Prints and Summit City Climbing Gym, from 25 applicants that competed in the event sponsored by the Charter One Foundation.

The competition was designed to help attract businesses to the University Park neighborhood and “give aspiring entrepreneurs the opportunity to bolster their business acumen,” said leaders of UPA, a nonprofit group working on the redevelopment of 50 city blocks around the University of Akron and surrounding areas downtown.

The two winners each will receive \$17,500, assistance locating a suitable site within University Park and ongoing consulting support as they bring their business ideas to fruition from in-kind sponsors Vorys, Sater, Seymour & Pease LLC, and Meaden & Moore.

About the winners:

- Rubber City Prints, co-founded by Pam Testa and Nicole Schneider, is a collaborative fine art print studio and gallery offering intaglio, relief, screen-printing and letterpress capabilities as well as exhibition space. Through its future space in University Park, Rubber City Prints will seek to strengthen the local art community through educational workshops, internship opportunities and professional fine art printing services. A minimum of 2,500 square feet of industrial space will be required for the new venture.
- Summit City Climbing Gym, an indoor climbing and fitness facility, will be an urban destination for fitness enthusiasts and adventure seekers.

Co-founders Nathan and Liz Yokum have been leaders in the regional climbing community through owning and operating Rock Candy Holds LLC — a producer of indoor rock climbing holds in the U.S. with distribution internationally, UPA officials said. In addition to being the largest indoor climbing facility in the area, Summit City’s professionally designed 10,000-square-foot climbing space and extensive programming for all ages and abilities will set it apart from the existing indoor climbing facilities, officials said.

“All of the contestants submitted intriguing proposals, which resulted in a real challenge for our judges. We are pleased that the winning plans will introduce exciting new businesses to the University Park community, and we are already looking forward to next year’s competition,” UPA Executive Director Eric Anthony Johnson said.

“The future is bright for Akron neighborhoods like University Park, and successful public/private sector partnerships like this one will continue to strengthen the city,” said Ken Marblestone, president of Charter One and RBS Citizens, Ohio.

“University Park is such a diverse and exciting neighborhood. With the addition of two innovative new businesses — Summit City Climbing and Rubber City Prints — it is on the right track to become a thriving hub of economic diversity with a growing retail corridor.”

Presented by Charter One Foundation through its Growing Communities Initiative, the competition also receives support from University of Akron Research Foundation; the Student Venture Fund at the University of Akron; Vorys, Sater, Seymour & Pease LLC; and Meaden & Moore.

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