

**FY23 ANNUAL REPORT**

**IOWA<sup>TM</sup>**

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**John Pappajohn  
Entrepreneurial Center**

**John Pappajohn**  
1928-2023

Positive Mental Attitude

# REMEMBERING JOHN PAPPAJOHN: ENTREPRENEURIAL ICON AND BELOVED FRIEND

**By DAVID HENSLEY**  
Executive Director, Iowa JPEC  
Clinical Professor - Management and Entrepreneurship Department

This past spring, we lost John Pappajohn, a dear friend and entrepreneurial legend. His vision to create the John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Centers transformed entrepreneurship and innovation education across five campuses and served as a catalyst for building a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem throughout Iowa. He is remembered for his unmatched commitment to Iowa entrepreneurs, unparalleled positive mental attitude, unique ability to recognize and seize opportunities, and genuine kindness shown to all.

A self-made entrepreneur and venture capitalist, John's work ethic was legendary. Being an entrepreneur and venture investor was not a job to John, it drove him. He loved the challenge of bringing innovative technologies to the marketplace to solve problems and impact people's lives.

John believed that having a strong leadership team was critical to launching and building a successful high-potential venture. He cited technical knowledge, industry experience, leadership ability, work ethic, and integrity as critical skills he looked for in entrepreneurial leaders. John and Mary started sponsoring new venture competitions for state of Iowa students and community entrepreneurs in 2000. During the competitions, he often said how impressed he was with the entrepreneurs, even though most of them did not have the type of technology venture in which he would typically invest. His eyes twinkled as he handed out checks to the top entrepreneurs; John knew how to pick winners, and regardless of if their current business did not make it, he was confident they would eventually make something big happen.



Of the top three placewinners in the annual Pappajohn Iowa Entrepreneurial Venture Competition, there has been a 90% success rate of the businesses receiving cash awards.

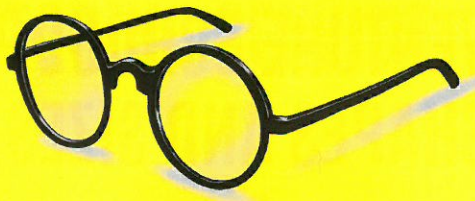
When speaking to students, aspiring entrepreneurs, or business and community leaders, John expressed the importance of having a positive mental attitude (PMA). He believed that it was one of the driving reasons behind his entrepreneurial and investment success. The self-proclaimed PMA Kid, John continued to be a venture investor into his 90s.

Since 2016, Iowa JPEC has partnered with the Tippie College of Business Institute for International Business to host African leaders participating in the Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders. As part of the experience, the Fellows traveled to Des Moines to meet and hear from John. This event was always cited as one of the most inspirational experiences the Fellows had during the program.

One entrepreneur had a chicken business and he was describing how he planned to expand the operation. John told him about when he was a boy working at his dad's grocery store, one of his jobs was to pluck feathers off chickens. He also would sell items to the local junkyard owner to make a dollar and pick up spare pennies on the sidewalk. Throughout his early years, John faced many challenges that helped him develop a toughness and grit that served him well throughout his life. John congratulated the Fellow on his business and encouraged him to work hard, generate positive cash flow, and keep pushing forward. Having a successful entrepreneur and venture investor show interest and enthusiasm for this type of business made an impact on all of the African entrepreneurs.



*"If I can do it, you can do it."*  
— John Pappajohn



Another Fellow was working in the medical services space, an industry John was highly knowledgeable and successful in. After hearing about the business venture, John spent the next few minutes grilling the entrepreneur about his business plan. He then offered to connect him to people in his network to help the Fellow's business grow faster, provide better health services to his community, and make a profit. He ended his talks with the Fellows by saying, "If I can do it, you can do it." John believed that and invested his time and treasure to foster an entrepreneurial ecosystem to support innovators, creators, and aspiring entrepreneurs of all ages and abilities.

Another story comes from the day he spoke on campus about the importance of giving back to the community. John brought nearly \$10,000 in cash to provide 1,000 students a chance to be a philanthropist. He said he started giving back to Iowa upon graduation in a modest way each year. As his success grew, he was able to increase his support and have greater impact. He challenged the students to take the \$10 and place it in one of the bags at the back of the room to support a cause they were interested in. Then, he encouraged

them to continue giving each year because it would make a difference and make them feel good.

Always willing to help, John created opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs to learn and pursue their dreams, he encouraged others to support important causes and get active in their communities, he demonstrated what is possible if you work hard and have a positive mental attitude. John will be greatly missed, but we will continue moving forward supporting his vision for entrepreneurship in Iowa.

John Pappajohn – one of a kind and an inspiration for generations to come.

**READ MORE ABOUT  
JOHN PAPPAJOHN:**



# VENTURE SCHOOL PROVIDES BUSINESSES OF ALL SHAPES AND SIZES OPPORTUNITIES TO SUCCEED

An opportunity to relocate to Iowa gave Lori Palmer an opportunity to grow as an entrepreneur.

A registered nurse with a BS in nursing, Palmer has always had an entrepreneurial interest and pursued an MBA to learn more about the business side of healthcare. After growing a medical practice for a group of physicians in Denver, Colorado, a move to Iowa prompted her to try her hand in owning and building a business for herself. For six years she owned, operated, and successfully generated income from a commercial cleaning company targeting healthcare clinics.

The idea for Palmer's new company, SimplSupport, was inspired by her mother-in-law, whose greatest wish was to stay in her home in her final years. Because of declining health, her mother-in-law required numerous medical appointments.

"She didn't drive, so it was up to us as a family to try to help coordinate her appointments," Palmer said.

Because of travel time from Des Moines to northern Iowa, medical appointments zapped an entire day, so Palmer began looking for alternatives. She understood the medical profession and became frustrated with the options available to them as a family.

"I wanted a nurse who could attend the appointments and talk to me about the plan of care," Palmer said. "I needed a person with a high-level understanding of lab values, medication changes, and diagnostics."

Through traditional options, families are typically assigned a medical aide with no guarantee of getting the same person twice. That meant there was no consistency with the care provider and there wasn't a high level of medical education to be the eyes and ears when the family couldn't be there. While searching for better options to alleviate stress on her family, SimplSupport was born.



"I know that nurses would like to help people like this, but how do they find people that need help?" Palmer said. "The idea came for a platform where people could post their care needs and nurses could pick up nurse-gig work."

The solution filled the gap where insurance may not provide coverage, but support is still needed.

Palmer sold her cleaning company and is using the funds to start SimplSupport.

"I'm 100% building this business right now," she said.

In Spring 2023, Palmer enrolled in the Des Moines cohort of Venture School, sponsored by the University of Iowa John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center. She shared first place and won \$1,500 at the final pitch competition, then was invited to Venture School Statewide Launch Day on June 7-8 in Iowa City. SimplSupport topped 10 other business pitches and earned \$15,000.

"Venture School is an environment where you can fine-tune your messaging," Palmer said. "It's a great experience to stand up each week, pitch your business concept, and see how it lands. There is no other environment that I've experienced where you can continuously receive helpful peer and mentor feedback on what it is you're trying to convey."

Palmer had a soft launch of SimplSupport in Des Moines in the summer of 2023. After testing the market, the intention is to expand across Iowa and eventually as a national platform.

"Venture School made me take a hard look at all avenues of the business," Palmer said. "It drilled into specifics so that we can have a targeted focus on the market we serve."

**Since Fall of 2013, 921 individuals have participated in Venture School.**

# LAUNCHED IN 2021, IOWA VENTURE MENTORING SERVICE PROGRAM CONTINUES TO THRIVE

Martha Carney wished she had a mentor when starting her two businesses. Steve Davis received plenty of assistance from the University of Iowa John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center (Iowa JPEC) and didn't hesitate to give back when asked.

Carney and Davis are two of 65 mentors who assist with the University of Iowa Venture Mentoring Service that completed its second year. The model uses the Team Mentoring methodology licensed from the MIT Venture Mentoring Service that links entrepreneurial ventures with experienced mentors.

In 2022-23, Iowa JPEC's program included 65 mentors and 22 ventures, up from 20 mentors and 10 ventures when the program began in October of 2021.

"I'm a recovered entrepreneur and there is nothing like the gratification of owning, starting, and growing your own business," said Carney. "It's not easy. But once you're an entrepreneur, you're always an entrepreneur, and you always want to help."

Carney lives in Naperville, Illinois, but will soon split residency between Iowa City, Iowa and Palm Springs, California. Davis grew up in a suburb of Milwaukee and attended the University of Iowa, where he competed in gymnastics. As an undergraduate majoring in engineering, Davis approached Iowa JPEC with a business idea. The idea became Bio::Neos, a North Liberty-based company that produces custom software for genomics research.

"We are extremely grateful to Iowa JPEC, so whenever there is a request for help, or a way to make a positive impact, we try to do it," Davis said.

A current beneficiary of the Iowa VMS program is Ned Bowden, a professor in the University of Iowa department of chemistry. Bowden developed a sulfur-based fertilizer that can increase harvest yields of crops (especially corn) by nearly 6%. He is expanding operations of the company Harvest Increase Agriculture, and has thrived being involved with a four-person mentor team through Iowa VMS.

"The contacts (Iowa VMS) throws at us have been very helpful," Bowden said. "We also receive valuable feedback about what we should be doing and what we shouldn't worry about."

**Martha Carney is one of 65 mentors who assist with the University of Iowa Venture Mentoring Service that completed its second year in 2022-23.**



As of June 1, 2023, 95% of VMS ventures have raised capital and/or grants and 47% have generated revenue.

Iowa JPEC launched the Venture Mentoring Service in 2021 alongside John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Centers at Drake University, Iowa State University, North Iowa Area Community College, and the University of Northern Iowa, thanks in part to a grant from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

**As of June 1, 2023**

**47% of University of Iowa VMS ventures have generated revenue**

**95% of University of Iowa VMS ventures have raised capital and/or grants**

# BEEKEEPING ENTREPRENEUR BRIDGES ECONOMIC DISPARITIES THROUGH HONEY

As a private practice lawyer in Tanzania, Eugene Nyalile observed firsthand the economic disparity between honey producers and buyers.

Every day, Nyalile worked with wildlife and environmental conservation and often negotiated conflicts between cattle farmers and grain farmers. Because of what he saw as a lawyer — including low-ball prices from middlemen to honey producers — Nyalile co-founded the honey brand A.LE & TOM Natural Products and flew into the beekeeping business. He now owns more than 600 hives with 420 beekeepers. After successfully completing Venture School as part of the Mandela Washington Fellowship on July 11, 2023, those hive and beekeeper numbers will increase.

Nyalile's pitch to a panel of judges was so impressive that he won \$5,000 from the University of Iowa John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center (Iowa JPEC). When he accepted the check, his thoughts turned to his beekeepers in Tanzania — 70% who are women — and he was overcome with emotion.

"When I started pitching, due to my language barrier, I couldn't even speak; I was frozen," Nyalile said. "Pitching was a challenge for me, but I improved after receiving coaching."

Nyalile cleared the hurdle of presenting in English. While holding an oversized check in one hand, Nyalile wiped tears from his eyes with the other. In a way, he did this for the people who labored to produce honey in Tanzania, only to be forced to sell for an insultingly low price. A.LE & TOM Natural Products makes life better for many honey and wax producers by purchasing hives for them.

"They are so happy they cry when I buy honey from them," Nyalile said. "I realize I am going to be able to invest more hives for them to have more honey and it touches my heart. This is going to make them happy and that's what made me emotional."

Nyalile, 34, participated in the Mandela Washington Fellowship because he wanted to learn more about — and network with — others in the beekeeping business.

"I want to bring new ideas back home on how the beekeeping industry is run or how they run beekeeping industry in the United States," he said.

Nyalile is one of 25 Fellows from 20 sub-Saharan African countries who studied on the University of Iowa campus for six weeks in June and July. The 2023 cohort marked the eighth time Iowa JPEC has hosted the Mandela Washington Fellowship.

"This program helped me from discovering customers to how to program my activities," Nyalile said. "I also learned from the other Fellows — there are some Fellows who started talking about me doing business in their country. You don't have to go far to find customers, they might be next door to you."

Through A.LE & TOM, Nyalile is building an agribusiness with the goal of sharing Tanzania's natural foods globally, including in the United States. His primary product is a variety of honey: Eucalyptus, Miombo, and Highlands Winter Honey. A.LE & TOM produces at least 30 tons of honey in a season; there could be two or three seasons per year.

Nyalile will continue to practice law in Tanzania. But he has added a new, rewarding venture that has become a passion. Because of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, that fire of passion could soon burn deep in all corners of the world.



**2023 was the eighth year the University of Iowa hosted young African leaders through the Mandela Washington program.**

# GUDENKAUF'S PTXTENSION APP REVOLUTIONIZES PHYSICAL THERAPY ACCOUNTABILITY

Following a sports hernia during his junior high school football season, Ryan Gudenkauf underwent rehabilitation, compelled to prepare for spring track and field.

But Gudenkauf, like a majority of patients who rehab injuries, wasn't thorough with his recommended exercise plan. No one kept him on track and accountable. And for someone who hopes to become a physical therapist, Gudenkauf knew that his was not an isolated incident.

Regardless of why Gudenkauf didn't keep up with his home rehabilitation, there was one painful result: he was not healed when track and field began.

"It took me awhile to recover and maybe I could have recovered faster if I had been more diligent," Gudenkauf said.

Because of personal experience, observations while completing his own physical therapy internship, and feedback from therapists, Gudenkauf founded PTXtension, a mobile app aimed at improving patient accountability and boosting the success and cost effectiveness of physical therapy.

"The idea is to keep recovery on schedule, not necessarily make it shorter," Gudenkauf said. "A therapist comes up with the (rehab) program, expecting you will follow it the whole time. If they have a timeline in their head, it involves you completing all your exercises. The idea is to keep people from making excessive visits (to the physical therapist) or quitting therapy."

The web-based application comes with built-in functionality. A therapist is able to implement an in-home plan with patients, complete with number of reps for a certain number of times per day. Once the plan is proposed, patients can watch pre-made videos in their patient account. Check boxes keep them on task and a journal and dropdown pain scale — filled out by the patient — is sent directly to the therapist.

"We hope they see that the application makes a difference in patient recovery and it is something clinics would like to implement," said Gudenkauf. "I would like to partner with the health records platforms they use and have the health records offer the application bundled into their own software at an

increased subscription price."

Gudenkauf received a bachelor of business administration degree in the spring of 2023 and is enrolled in graduate school at the University of Iowa where he intends to earn a doctorate of physical therapy degree in December of 2025. While his graduate school workload is a priority, Gudenkauf still hopes to test the functionality of his app in late 2024 or early 2025.

"I'm moving over to school mode now," Gudenkauf said. "I want to do my best to become a physical therapist. Once I have graduated, I can come back and work on (PTXtension) as well."

His involvement with the University of Iowa John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center (Iowa JPEC) — and benefitting from its resources — helped Gudenkauf learn about the business model canvas and understand customer discovery.

"Without (Iowa JPEC) I never would have been able to partner with Startup Incubator and raise funding," Gudenkauf said. "I wouldn't have known about the opportunities. I have been able to grow."

Gudenkauf has enjoyed success with Fall Innovation Challenge events, winning a \$5,000 first-place award in the undergraduate Best Technology category in 2020, and placing second to win \$2,500 in the same category in 2021.

"Being involved with Iowa JPEC, and especially the Startup Incubator, I have gained an appreciation for entrepreneurship," Gudenkauf said. "I wouldn't eliminate the idea of pursuing future business opportunities."



**Since 2004, 1,594 students have been impacted by the undergraduate Startup Incubator.**





Jason Feifer, editor in chief of Entrepreneur magazine, speaks to University of Iowa students on Oct. 27, 2022.



Jon Lensing (MD '20), CEO of OpenLoop, accepts a Prometheus Award on Nov. 3, 2022 in Des Moines, Iowa.



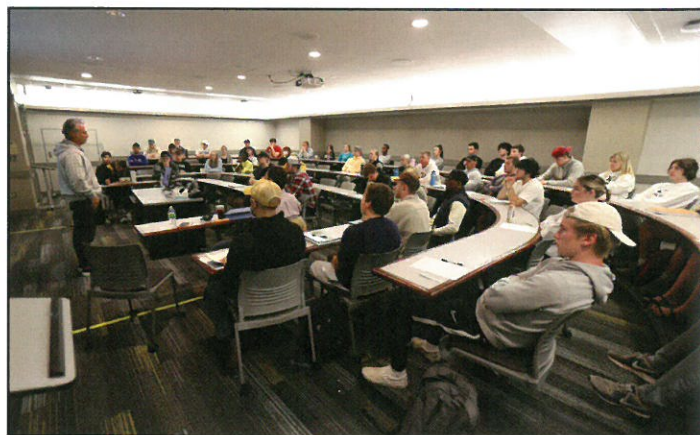
University of Iowa students brainstorm ideas (while energizing with a Red Bull) during Startup Games on March 4, 2023 in the Pappajohn Business Building.



It was a full house in the Old Capitol Museum for the Iowa JPEC Innovation and Entrepreneurship Awards event Sept. 9, 2022.



Hundreds of students attended the inaugural BBQ Bash at the BELL on Sept. 28, 2022 outside the Bedell Entrepreneurial Learning Laboratory.



Byron Roth, chairman and CEO of ROTH Capital Partners, speaks to students in the Pappajohn Business Building on Sept. 29, 2022.

# IOWA JPEC FY23 IMPACT

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

511

STARTUPS SERVED



216

EST. JOBS CREATED



848

CLIENTS ASSISTED



12,304

HOURS DEDICATED TO CLIENTS

## YOUTH PROGRAMS

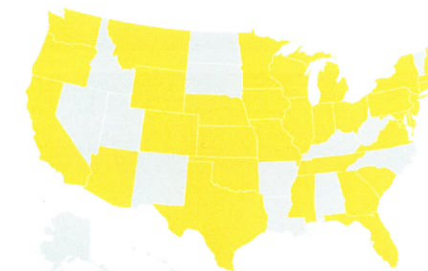
21,355

YOUTH IMPACTED



565

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS EARNING UNIVERSITY OF IOWA ENTR CREDIT



42

STATES AND DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Using Jacobson Institute products in K-12 Schools

## STARTUP INCUBATION

\$408,350

TOTAL SEED FUNDING AWARDED

69

STARTUPS IN INCUBATORS / ACCELERATORS

16

IOWA COUNTIES SERVED BY BUSINESS CONSULTING

LOCATIONS FOR VENTURE SCHOOL TRAINING

- Davenport/Quad Cities
- Des Moines
- Dubuque
- Iowa City/Cedar Rapids
- Mason City
- Sioux City

# 2023 INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP HONORS

Scan the QR code to discover more exciting stories and updates from Iowa JPEC.



## John Pappajohn Alumni Entrepreneurs of the Year

**Jerry Bednyak (BS '01) and Eric Vassilatos (BBA '01) | Managing Partners, SkyBox-Capital**

A combination of Bednyak's engineering and Vassilatos' accounting pursuits, along with a desire to earn spending cash as college students, led to the creation of Vivid Seats, a ticket marketplace connecting fans to live events. They sold Vivid Seats and started Skybox-Capital, a hands-on, value-added investor in e-commerce and digital media.

## Alumni Entrepreneurial Leadership

**John Mickelson (BBA '03, MBA '07, JD '07) | Co-Founder and Managing Partner, Midwest Growth Partners**

Mickelson said he was born with an entrepreneurial gene, and Iowa JPEC fine-tuned his gift. It was in college where he witnessed challenges and successes of fellow students who were building businesses, and he found comfort in bouncing ideas off them. Mickelson also learned the importance of scaling a business and founding something with growth potential.

## Young Alumni Entrepreneur of the Year

**Josh Krakauer (BBA '12) | CEO, Sculpt**

As a 22-year-old, Krakauer founded Sculpt, a business-to-business social media marketing agency. Krakauer and Sculpt are still thriving, even though the industry has seen many twists and turns in the last 11 years. He is also a member of the Iowa JPEC alumni advisory board.

## Young Alumni Entrepreneurial Leadership

**Erica Cole (BA '19) | Founder and CEO, No Limbits**

In 2018, Cole experienced a life-altering car accident that required the amputation of her left leg below her knee. This tragic event abruptly ended her career as a chemist due to safety concerns in the lab. It was from this adversity that would evolve into No Limbits, an adaptive clothing line.

## Iowa Innovator of the Year

**Howard Urnovitz, PhD | CEO, FBB Biomed**

In 1981, Urnovitz followed Dr. Richard Lynch to the University of Iowa as a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Pathology. His company, FBB Biomed, provides a blood test to replace the painful spinal tap procedure. The test is able to diagnose multiple diseases with 100% accuracy in early trials.

## Venture School Business of the Year

**Russel Karim | Founder, Dhakai, Inc.**

Growing up in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Karim's childhood was centered around clothing production. His parents, grandparents, neighbors, friends, and mentors were all involved in the clothing supply chain. The formative experiences in Bangladesh led Karim to form Dhakai, an online marketplace that helps brands connect with sustainable and ethical manufacturers.

## Student Startup of the Year

**Martell Bell (BS '19, MS '22) | Founder and CEO, Ignite Consulting**

Bell's company delivers STEM education to middle school and high school students in interactive ways. A first-generation college student, Bell is pursuing a PhD in mechanical engineering. Ignite Consulting recently partnered with Transitions Lab University Preparatory School, where Bell will work with children from India and Dubai.

## Student Startup of the Year

**Jaecee Hall (BA '23) | Founder, Unbreakable Female Athlete**

Hall's business idea came to life in Iowa City, Iowa, and has led to apparel being worn worldwide. She is a member of the women's rowing team and her search for clothing that recognized her as a female athlete inspired the creation of Unbreakable Female Athlete.

## Entrepreneurial Leadership Student of the Year

**Robbie Weiland (BA '23)**

Weiland served as treasurer and president of the entrepreneurial honor society Sigma Nu Tau. During his time in college, he was put in positions to lead, and thanks to Iowa JPEC, learned how to lead teams to success. Currently, Weiland is part of the management training program for Enterprise Holdings.

## International Entrepreneurship Impact

**Dave Okech | Founder and CEO, AquaRech LTD**

A member of the 2016 Mandela Washington Fellowship cohort, Okech followed that with a designation as an Acumen Fellow in 2019 and appointments as a Global Farmer Network Fellow in 2020, and an Africa Food Systems Fellow in 2022. He was also selected into the Obama Foundation Leaders Africa program.

## Jacobson Institute K-12 Innovator

**Corey Brinkmeyer | Linn-Mar (Iowa) High School**

At Linn-Mar High School, Brinkmeyer contributes the most in the areas of marketing, entrepreneurship, and The Roar Store, a school-themed apparel and merchandise store. His entrepreneurship class uses the BizInnovator Startup curriculum and a handful of his students have participating in DesignDash — a one day entrepreneurial startup simulation.

## Iowa JPEC Mentor of the Year

**Steve Davis (BS '01, MS '03) | President and Co-Founder, Bio::Neos, Inc.**

Davis was among the pioneering volunteers who completed training through MIT VMS in 2021. He has never forgotten the support he received from Iowa JPEC when he was a student and that feeling of gratitude fuels his desire to volunteer.

# IOWA JPEC FY23 IMPACT

## IN THE CLASSROOM

**4,712**  
STUDENT ENROLLMENTS

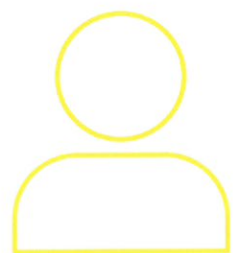


**137**  
SECTIONS OF  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
CLASSES TAUGHT

**90+**  
MAJORS TAKING  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
CLASSES

**428**  
NEW ALUMNI  
IN FY23

## REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE



**6,889**  
PROGRAM, SEMINAR,  
& WORKSHOP  
PARTICIPANTS

### PROVIDE UNIQUE REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCES:

- Entrepreneurial Leadership Academy
- Commercializing New Technology Academy
- Okoboji Entrepreneurial Institute
- Statewide, National and International Internships
- Student Business Consulting
- Multiple Student Organizations

## STUDENT ENTREPRENEURS

### STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Startup Incubator
- Acceleration Programs
- Coworking Space
- Financial, Accounting, and Marketing Support
- Prototyping and Software Development
- Legal Consulting
- Seed Funding Competitions

**10,000**  
SQUARE FOOT  
STUDENT INCUBATOR

**4**  
UNIQUE STUDENT  
INCUBATOR/  
ACCELERATOR  
PROGRAMS



Amanda Gustafson and Aunica Harvey of Premiere Dance Project answer questions from Iowa JPEC executive director David Hensley as part of the Innovation and Inspiration Speaker Series in the Iowa Memorial Union on Oct. 6, 2022.



Participants of an Iowa City Venture School cohort gather after final pitches Nov. 15, 2022 in Iowa City, Iowa.



A student gives her pitch during IdeaStorm on Feb. 15, 2023 in the Pappajohn Business Building.



Winter Philibert and Kelsey Dawes of Relevant Methyloomics celebrate a successful Innovation Challenge award's night April 12, 2023 at MERGE Iowa City.



University of Iowa entrepreneurial students receive advice from Nick Rhodes (Obsession Media) and Adam Keune (Higher Learning Technologies) during the advisory board meeting April 14, 2023 in the Old Capitol Town Center in Iowa City, Iowa.



Since 2006, students from Iowa and four other educational institutions in the state attend the annual Okoboji Entrepreneurial Institute (OEI). The 2023 cohort is pictured with Tom Bedell, successful entrepreneur and one of the driving forces behind the creation of OEI.

# CYBERSECURITY ENTREPRENEUR WARNER NAMED IOWA SMALL BUSINESS PERSON OF THE YEAR

It has been quite a year for University of Iowa graduate Aaron Warner, founder and CEO of ProCircular, a company that provides cybersecurity and compliance for mid-market firms.

Warner (BA '00, MBA '15) is a native of Iowa City, Iowa, and was named Entrepreneur of the Year by the Corridor Business Journal in 2022. In November of 2022, his company won a Prometheus Award for Small/Medium Iowa Technology Company of the Year. Six months later, Warner was named Iowa Small Business Person of the Year by the United States Small Business Administration (SBA). That recognition earned him a trip to the Rose Garden at the White House as well as in-person acknowledgment from Kim Reynolds, governor of Iowa.

Awards are certainly validation of a job well done and Warner and his staff of nearly 60 have enjoyed the spotlight. He also gives credit where credit is due.

"Paul Heath is a quiet force behind so much success in eastern Iowa," Warner said. "He has a lot to do with us receiving a lot of this recognition."

Heath is regional director of the University of Iowa's Small Business Development Center (SBDC) which is under the umbrella of the University of Iowa John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center.

Warner relied on Heath and the SBDC before he came up with a name for his business. In those early days, as Warner excitedly spoke to the SBDC about his ideas, Heath offered a firm reminder: You need a plan.

"Paul and the SBDC helped shepherd me along to making the introductions I needed, like help with banking and finding access to good legal advice," Warner said. "Paul was able to open a lot of those doors for me and make sure I had a sounding board, especially in the early days. That can be a very lonely place."

ProCircular was founded in 2016 and has offices in eastern Iowa and downtown Minneapolis. Prior to that, Warner spent more than 20 years at Integrated DNA Technologies, where he was frequently seeking advice on how to secure internal systems since his company held so much valuable intellectual property.

"I needed a company to help guide our efforts and I needed somebody who knew more than we did," Warner said.

There were large cybersecurity firms out there, but they came with a large price tag. There were also tiny firms willing to offer ho hum alternatives like another firewall. Warner saw the steady flood of consultants as a waste of money.

"This is silly," he thought. "We can do this better ourselves."

So, ProCircular was created. Thanks to Heath and the SBDC, Warner fielded questions about the company's "end game" that he didn't think of before.

"Those early questions have a lot to do with why ProCircular looks the way it does," Warner said. "We're a full-service firm and that is not easy. It would be much easier to focus on one of the 16 different things that we do. Paul had good advice along the lines of, 'Well, if you're going to play it that way, your company has to look a certain way from a growth perspective.'"

Heath has imparted a lot of business wisdom to hundreds of founders in his nearly 40 years with the SBDC. Warner is a recent success story.

"Aaron is passionate about his business and always looking for ways to innovate and grow," Heath said. "He challenges his employees to think outside the box and come up with new ideas. He knows the importance of innovation and customer service."



**Aaron Warner (right), founder and CEO of ProCircular, was named Iowa Small Business Person of the Year by the United States Small Business Administration. He is joined by Paul Heath, regional director of the University of Iowa's Small Business Development Center.**

**In FY23, 890 hours were dedicated to 327 clients through our Small Business Development Center.**




**Kimm Harris (left), associate professor of practice, director of undergraduate studies in the University of Iowa John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center, was the third recipient of the Henry A. Johnson Entrepreneurship Teaching Award on May 3, 2023 in the Iowa Memorial Union. Harris is shown with Amy Kristof-Brown, Henry B. Tippie Dean.**

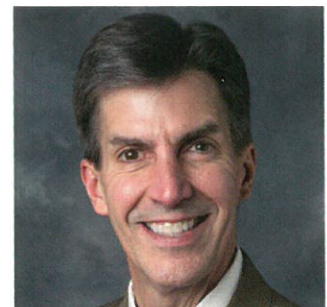
## KIMM HARRIS RECEIVES JOHNSON TEACHING AWARD

Kimm Harris, associate professor of practice, director of undergraduate studies in the University of Iowa John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center, was the third recipient of the Henry A. Johnson Entrepreneurship Teaching Award on May 3, 2023 in the Iowa Memorial Union.

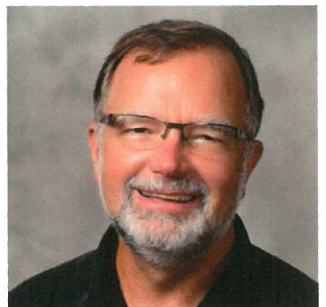
The annual award recognizes excellence in teaching entrepreneurship and innovation through the Tippie College of Business.

### PREVIOUS WINNERS

- 2022 Kevin Krause
- 2021 Bob Walker



Krause



Walker

# NSF I-CORPS WORKSHOP FUNDED THROUGH UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

From Nodes to Hubs, the University of Iowa NSF I-Corps Workshop experienced a slight change in syntax in 2023, but it remains a major four-week training program within the John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center.

A new program format has the University of Iowa as an affiliate member through the Great Lakes National Science Foundation I-Corps Hub, where individual institutions now receive funding and support through regional Hubs (ours is through the University of Michigan).

In the first seven years in the NSF I-Corps program (2015-21), Iowa received an initial grant of \$360,000 used primarily for instruction and program development. For the period from Jan. 1, 2023 to Dec. 31, 2024 the University of Iowa will receive \$400,000 in funding, with an additional two years and \$400,000 anticipated.

The NSF I-Corps Workshop provides entrepreneurial training for faculty, staff, and graduate students pursuing technology commercialization of their university discoveries and innovations. I-Corps was designed to increase the economic impact of National Science Foundation funded research.



**For additional copies of the FY23 John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center Annual Report, contact [iowajpec@uiowa.edu](mailto:iowajpec@uiowa.edu)**





Since 2014, 2,701 high school students in the United States have earned JPEC college credit through Jacobson Institute programs.

## JACOBSON INSTITUTE PROGRAMMING CREATES PIPELINE TO WHAT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA HAS TO OFFER

Abby Way wanted to major in business in college, so she loaded up on business courses during her senior year at Dallastown High School in York, Pennsylvania.

One of those classes was in entrepreneurship and followed the BizInnovator Startup curriculum developed by the Jacobson Institute at the University of Iowa. An added bonus?

“I was super excited about receiving college credit before I was actually in college,” she said.

Way was interested in universities close to home like Penn State and Delaware, but decided on the University of Iowa where her parents attended. Her familiarity with BizInnovator Startup provided an additional nudge to the Midwest.

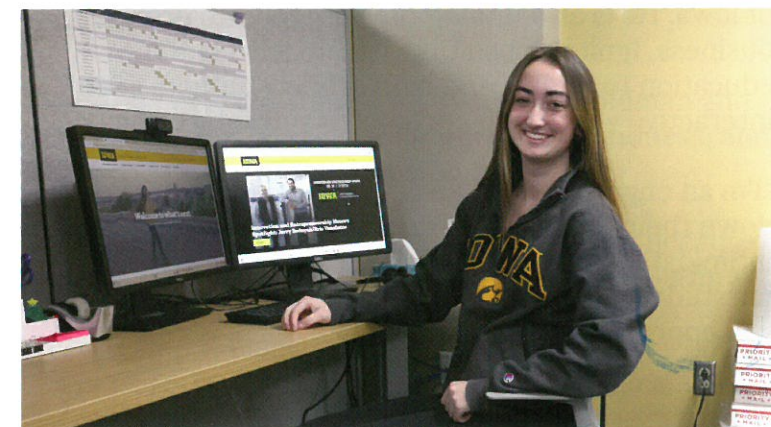
“I knew Iowa had a good business school,” said Way, a junior majoring in business analytics.

For Way, BizInnovator Startup exposed her to entrepreneurship and it served as an 880-mile pipeline from York, Pennsylvania to Iowa City, Iowa. She thrived with the group-work assignments and collaborating with others on entrepreneurial startup projects.

“That has carried over to the University of Iowa,” Way said. “As I am getting higher into business analytics classes, we still do group projects. Learning how that worked in the high school entrepreneurship class set me up for success in classes at Iowa.”

She is not alone. Since 2014, 2,701 high school students from 27 states earned college credit through Jacobson Institute classes. Of that total, 395 students from nine states enrolled at the University of Iowa, a return of 14.6%.

“We’re on a mission to develop the next generation of innovators, inventors, and entrepreneurs and bringing the University of Iowa into high school classrooms across the country,” said Dawn Bowlus, Jacobson Institute director. “We’re giving students an



University of Iowa junior Abby Way was exposed to BizInnovator Startup in high school in Pennsylvania. She is now programs and events intern for the Jacobson Institute.

opportunity to test drive what the University of Iowa has to offer – hands on, student-centered, experiential learning.”

There is another twist to Way’s collegiate journey. During her first semester on campus, she rushed Delta Sigma Pi, a business fraternity that focuses on professional development. At the first meeting, she was matched with a peer mentor. As they got to know each other, her mentor mentioned that she worked on BizInnovator Startup curriculum as part of her internship at the Jacobson Institute.

“I said, I took that class in high school,” said Way, who was then connected to Bowlus and Jenn Jacobson, administrative services coordinator.

It didn’t take long for Way’s entrepreneurial ride to come full circle. She is now the programs and events intern for the Jacobson Institute with an office in the Pappajohn Business Building.

How to bring Jacobson Institute programming to your area



## DESIGN DASH INSPIRES CONFIDENCE, COLLABORATION AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Todd Kern spent 20 years in the corporate apparel business, including five with Abercrombie & Fitch. Now an educator at the Waterloo Career Center, Kern drove eight students to DesignDash on May 8, 2023 in Iowa City, where he was captivated by the day’s activities.

“This feels like being in a design session for a multi-million-dollar apparel brand,” Kern said. “This is exactly how it felt when we came up with a line of clothing.”

The students from Waterloo were among 77 from 12 Iowa high schools who participated in the second DesignDash of the spring. Another event was held April 11, 2023 in Cedar Rapids.

In a few hours, Brandon Caspers, a senior from Lisbon High School, helped create a business called Green Life Gardens, an all-inclusive gardening balcony box with seeds, compost, fertilizer, planting planner, recipe, and gardening gloves. Caspers and his team interviewed 40 people and 18 were interested in the product.

“The No. 1 thing I learned is confidence,” Caspers said. “I found myself in several situations where I had no idea what I was getting myself into. But I came into (DesignDash) with an open mind, the ability to figure out a plan, and work with my teammates.”

A sophomore at Iowa City West High School, Neema Ash worked with three others to create Serenity, a stress-management app. For Ash, the highlight of the event was an opportunity to collaborate with students from other schools.

“It’s fine to be by yourself and have your own opinion, but when you are with other people, your idea expands

and grows,” Ash said. “Working with others isn’t just important socially, it helps you grow as well.”

There were three DesignDash events held this academic year: one in the fall in Iowa City and two in the spring – one in Cedar Rapids and one in Iowa City. DesignDash is a one-day speedy startup simulation and part of the Jacobson Institute’s BizInnovator Startup entrepreneurship program. DesignDash events are organized by Dawn Bowlus, director of the Jacobson Institute, in collaboration with local entities interested in innovation, entrepreneurship, and creative problem solving. This year’s partners included the Iowa EdTech Collaborative, Iowa City Area Development, and Grant Wood Area Education Agency. The Jacobson Institute is part of the University of Iowa John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center (Iowa JPEC) – the lead sponsor for this program.

DesignDash provides high school students and educators an opportunity to work on authentic entrepreneurial startup ventures alongside real-life entrepreneurs and business executives.

“It bridges the gap between schools and communities and engages participants in creative problem-solving, tackling challenges about which they care,” Bowlus said. “DesignDash provides the full immersion experience kick-starting the process.”

203 students from 29 high schools participated in DesignDash in FY23.



# 1ST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT BELL LEADS THROUGH INNOVATION

Martell Bell is a first-generation college student who quickly excelled in the classroom by utilizing any and all available resources.

A native of Robbins, Illinois, Bell is pursuing more than a PhD in mechanical engineering from the University of Iowa. He is also finding the best ways to grow his business, Ignite Consulting, which delivers STEM education to middle and high school students in an interactive way that incorporates active learning.

"I'm an engineer, but I don't like shoving engineering down their throats," Bell said. "I want to make it less intimidating and make it as approachable as possible for students so they come in with an open mind. When you approach things with an open mind, it's easier to learn and easier to ask questions."

Bell has been a conference presenter in Baltimore and is part of the Upward Bound program in Cedar Rapids and at the University of Iowa. He has spoken at workshops and assisted with events with the organization Leaders, Believers, Achievers. Bell is at his client limit for Ignite Consulting, so he has turned to the University of Iowa John



**26 teams participated in four National Science Foundation cohorts in FY23.**

Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center (Iowa JPEC) to help guide his next steps.

Bell has completed the Graduate/Faculty/Staff Incubator multiple times (including in the summer of 2023), as well as other Iowa JPEC incubators and accelerators, including the Innovation Challenge pitch competition. His logical progression will be enrolling in NSF I-Corps in the Fall of 2023.

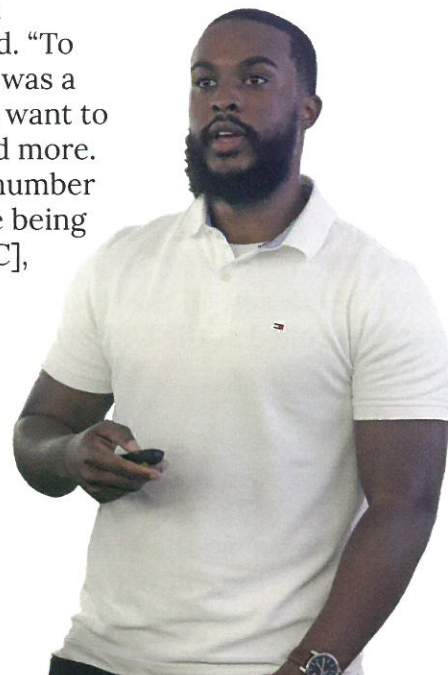
"The biggest thing for me – and this is a big thing throughout every aspect of my life – is having that community," Bell said. "Having different people to bump ideas off and having resources to help do things."

Through NSF I-Corps, Bell hopes to separate Ignite Consulting from other educational programs that have the same goal. He will focus on customer discovery for deciding what products to offer.

"I have a few clients and I know what is working for me now," Bell said. "I need to figure out what is going to work for me on a larger scale. I will hone in on my idea that will make me unique."

Iowa JPEC's NSF I-Corps Workshop is designed to provide University of Iowa faculty, staff, and students an opportunity to develop marketable ideas and accelerate their startup process. This workshop gives participants an introduction to the Lean Launchpad methodology and familiarizes them with the Business Model Canvas and customer discovery.

"I have always been an entrepreneur," Bell said. "To me, entrepreneurship was a mindset and made me want to investigate it more and more. Once I found out the number of resources that were being supplied [by Iowa JPEC], it was a no-brainer to keep pursuing it. I didn't have to think about it anymore."



# FROM JUNIOR HIGH CAMP TO MANAGING DIRECTOR: WESTERCAMP'S REMARKABLE JOURNEY FUELED BY IOWA JPEC

A seed planted with Laura Westercamp years ago is still growing and blooming, thanks to the University of Iowa John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center (Iowa JPEC).

Westercamp was a seventh-grader in the Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Community School District when her mother, Barbara, saw an advertisement in the local newspaper. The ad promoted the first-ever youth summer camp hosted by Iowa JPEC.

Without hesitation, the young Westercamp signed up. It marked the beginning of her association with Iowa JPEC that remains strong more than two decades later.

Westercamp has stockpiled a myriad of business experiences since those days at the junior high camp. It led her to continuing a family tradition by attending the University of Iowa where she triple-majored in finance, marketing, and management with the business school in 2007. She also majored in political science in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. On two occasions, Westercamp studied abroad – once in London and once in Thessaloniki, Greece.

"It was great to be supported at a place where I could learn across a diversity of disciplines," Westercamp said, "as well as get involved in student government, a business fraternity (Delta Sigma Pi), Hawkinson Institute, and leadership organizations (the Entrepreneurial Club, I-Envision, and Students in Free Enterprise)."

Westercamp was president of the I-Envision student organization from 2004-05 and president emeritus from 2005-06. She received second-place for Best Student Leader of the Year at the National CEO conference in 2005. That summer she received the President's Service Award from Students in Free Enterprise for completing 100 hours of service through I-Envision. She was one of 50 first-year students admitted annually to the Tippie College of Business as part of its Early Admission Program.

Throughout her career, Westercamp knew she could rely on a strong network of University of Iowa alumni. Nothing says Hawkeyes helping Hawkeyes more than when she earned an internship through the Hawkinson Institute with the investment bank Goldman Sachs in New York City. Getting an interview was difficult enough, but traveling to and navigating that in-person interview in New York appeared more daunting.

Westercamp scrapped together \$200 for airfare and was lucky enough to receive an assist from University of Iowa alumna Sandy Pfeiler (Davis) when she reached New York.

Westercamp crashed on Sandy's couch and received a ride to the interview.

"I got the offer and started my career at Goldman and learned that how you show up – with joy, kindness, and purpose – matters," Westercamp said.

Westercamp became interested in healthcare because of a grandmother who served as a World War II army nurse stationed in the China Burma India theater. Westercamp is managing director for Accenture Life Sciences and splits her time between Chicago and Cedar Rapids.

"At Accenture, I'm excited every day to be a change agent and intrapreneur (an entrepreneur within a large organization)," Westercamp said. "It is fun and rewarding to serve life sciences and medical technology clients who are transforming modern healthcare."

Westercamp is still connected to Iowa JPEC. After her freshman year at Iowa, she returned as a counselor at the Jacobson Entrepreneurship Summer Academy, the same camp where she cut her teeth as a middle school student. A member of the Iowa JPEC Advisory Board, Westercamp also serves as a mentor in Iowa JPEC's Venture Mentoring Service that began in 2021.

"Iowa JPEC creates wonderful life-long connections that benefit the state of Iowa, Midwest, and broader national and global community," Westercamp said. "Entrepreneurship drives limitless creativity and innovation, which creates opportunity and prosperity. It's our responsibility to pay it forward and giving back to Iowa JPEC creates purpose and impact."



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## John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center

### **JOHN PAPPAJOHN ENTREPRENEURIAL CENTER**

108 John Pappajohn Business Bldg., Ste. S160  
Iowa City, IA 52242-1994

P: 319-335-1022 | [iowajpec@uiowa.edu](mailto:iowajpec@uiowa.edu)

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