

UAB biotech startup wins \$22,000 in Alabama Launchpad competition

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Martin Swant --- The Birmingham News
By



Michael Heaven

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- A biotechnology company from the **University of Alabama at Birmingham** brought home big bucks Tuesday.

Proteomic Profiling Technologies, which has developed a method to identify causes of disease by observing samples such as blood and protein, won funding totaling \$22,000 from the **Economic Development Partnership of Alabama** in a proof of concept competition Tuesday. It was one of four start-up companies associated with Alabama universities that split \$100,000.

Six start-ups are competing in Alabama Launchpad, a contest sponsored by the EDPA that is meant to promote and reward high-growth, innovative startup companies from the state's research universities. Contestants are fledgling ventures in the seed or early-growth stages or businesses looking to move into a new high-growth market.

Alabama Launchpad gives early-stage companies the momentum to take an idea from concept to reality.

The businesses showing off their concepts Tuesday at EDPA's Beacon Parkway headquarters varied. One was developing a fertilizer that would allow farmers to yield a crop using less phosphate, a key ingredient. Another was developing a patent search software. Yet another was creating a device to measure a person's blood flow without touching the skin.

UAB doctoral student **Michael Heaven** co-founded Proteomic Profiling Technologies with **Archie Cobbs**. Heaven said the idea behind the company came to him during his biochemistry Ph.D. program at UAB. He was using mass spectrometers, an instrument that measures the masses and relative concentrations of atoms and molecules, and realized that available products had shortcomings. The product he is creating is a combination of analytical software and a formula researchers add to their samples before they're analyzed.

"I thought there must be some other way to do this," he said, recalling his idea. "And that's essentially what our consumer product is -- an analytical software that makes it easy for a researcher to get quantitative results from a mass spectrometer."

He said the \$22,000 in funding will build a prototype product that can be sent out to three clients -- UAB, **Southern Research Institute** and Vanderbilt University. Heaven said he's worked on the business plan for about two years. Last year he competed in Alabama Launchpad, but didn't make it to the final round.

"Just from competing in the Launchpad competition, we've had a lot of coaching from people at UAB and also from the **Birmingham Business Alliance**," he said. "It really helped me make the business plan better and also helped a lot with my presentation. I felt like even though we did win money in the competition, even if we hadn't I still would have benefited greatly."

The other UAB contestant on Tuesday was **Regenerative Solutions**, a contract research organization that would provide highly specialized preclinical testing for biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies. It would offer a "more realistic assessment of whether a drug could work," founder **Louise Hecker**, an assistant professor at UAB, told the panel of judges during her presentation. The company didn't win any funds from the proof of concept competition.

In addition to Proteomic Profiling Technologies, the other three companies awarded funding were: **MicroGreen Technologies** (University of Alabama), \$30,000; **Arch Data Intelligence** (University of Alabama at Huntsville), \$24,620; and **MilliTherm Technologies** (University of South Alabama), \$23,600.

The second phase of Alabama Launchpad is in May, when more established startup companies will compete for greater amounts of seed funding.

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