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5 Military Veterans Are Finalists Competing for Entrepreneurship \$\$\$\$

Houston, June 08, 2021

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The pressure is on, and the stakes are high. Five military veterans, finalists from HCC & UST's Veterans Entrepreneurship Program, will pitch their business ideas, just like Shark Tank, before a



panel of expert judges at noon, June 11, 2021. They are competing for one of three cash prizes to be used toward their business or further education.

Global Financial Business consultant Soledad Tanner MIB '02 will host the nail-biting event as it streams live on [YouTube <](#)

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpYDEAFbvBwp8tC_LT0_pwA>

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Meet the Finalists

The finalists and their ideas are as follows:

- **Aiyenede Akhigbe** pitches Sticky Spoons Jam. Akhigbe already produces over 100 flavors that are unique and free of preservatives, artificial flavors and high fructose syrup. Sticky Spoons uses natural ingredients sourced locally from Michigan farms. It would use prize money to build a licensed kitchen so the company can get out from under the Michigan Cottage Food Law, which restricts growth and marketing options.
- **Fatima Lewis's** company is called HTC. Her idea is to help relieve the burden of plastic waste by using the material to create stylish footwear. She would open a facility in a low-income neighborhood, becoming part of that economy and giving hope of a better future to the people there.
- **Tony Clement** is excited about Prolific Farms. He wants to use a vertical farming system to sustainably grow organic veggies and herbs while freeing up land, water and heavy equipment.
- **Jocelyn Williams** envisions CRJ Communications. She intends to create and execute digital content marketing for B2B Software as a Service (SaaS) clients, taking a spot within the \$3.5 trillion e-commerce industry.
- **Marilyn Harris** calls her idea the Women Veterans Pandemic Pivot Project (WV-PPP). She seeks mentorship and financial support to build the model for an innovative, interactive, gamified learning platform to assist women veterans who COVID-19 layoffs have impacted.

What to Expect

The maximum length for each veteran's pitch is limited to 10 minutes.

The first-place winner will receive \$5,000. Second gets \$3,000. And third takes \$2,000.

Judges are Chapter President for SCORE Houston, Lalitha Raman; Innovation Director for City of Houston, Jesse Bounds; and CEO for

Encore Search Partners, Jeremy Jenson.

Patrick Woock, Ph.D, and director of UST's [McNair Center for Free Enterprise & Entrepreneurship < https://www.stthom.edu/Academics/Centers-of-Excellence/McNair-Center-for-Free-Enterprise-Entrepreneurship/Index.aqf>](https://www.stthom.edu/Academics/Centers-of-Excellence/McNair-Center-for-Free-Enterprise-Entrepreneurship/Index.aqf), said, "The VEP collaboration with HCC helps our veterans to create and grow a small business. Through the 3-stage program, they've gained digital and business skills and received priceless feedback and advice. The upcoming pitch competition is where the rubber meets the road."