

SUPPORTING RURAL ENTREPRENEURS

BY CANDI KARSJENS, DIRECTOR, NIACC JOHN PAPPJOHN ENTREPRENEURIAL CENTER

John Pappajohn (July 31, 1928 - April 22, 2023), a successful entrepreneur and philanthropist from Iowa, had a profound commitment to nurturing entrepreneurship, especially among students. His vision was rooted in the belief that young people possess innovative ideas and the drive to turn them into successful ventures with the right support and resources.

Pappajohn aimed to empower the next generation of business leaders, foster innovation and contribute to the economic growth of the region. Through his initiatives, he sought to create a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem where students could unleash their potential and make meaningful contributions to society.

Pappajohn's support for student entrepreneurs in Iowa was comprehensive and multifaceted. He established entrepreneurial centers at four universities and one community college in Iowa, providing students with resources, mentorship and networking opportunities. Additionally, Pappajohn provided seed capital to numerous student-led startups, enabling them to transform their ideas into viable businesses. His sponsorship of student venture plan competitions incentivized entrepreneurship among students, offering cash prizes and mentorship to winners.

Despite Pappajohn's efforts, entrepreneurship in rural Iowa still faces significant challenges. Limited access to resources, smaller markets, isolation, skills gaps, inadequate infrastructure and economic factors pose barriers for aspiring rural entrepreneurs. Overcoming these challenges requires concerted efforts to improve access to resources, provide entrepreneurial education and training, enhance infrastructure



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and technology, and foster collaboration and networking among rural entrepreneurs.

Pappajohn's provision of seed capital to early-stage student entrepreneurs plays a pivotal role in their journey, providing crucial financial support that enables them to navigate the challenging early stages of business development, covering expenses such as product development, marketing and operational costs.

To address these rural challenges and continue fostering student entrepreneurship in Iowa, the Great Plains Entrepreneurial Consortium (GPEC) was established in 2023. Founded by several universities and colleges in western Iowa, including Drake University's Pappajohn and Buchanan Centers, Buena Vista University, Dordt University, Morningside University, Central College and North Iowa Area Community College Pappajohn Center, GPEC aimed to create a platform that supports entrepreneurship in the region.



The consortium seeks to leverage institutional resources to enhance entrepreneurship opportunities. Leaders envision a future where western Iowa thrives as an entrepreneurial powerhouse.

As part of its initiatives, GPEC sponsored the inaugural Iowa Student Entrepreneurship Conference alongside the first round of the final Pappajohn Student Entrepreneurial Venture Competition. Held in partnership between the North Iowa Area Community College and Drake University John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Centers, the conference featured workshops, seminars and networking opportunities for over 40 student entrepreneurs.

The conference included several workshops and seminars led by Iowa entrepreneurs, innovators and business leaders from across Iowa. The conference also provided student entrepreneurs the opportunity to network and participate in a design challenge led by Hank Norem, chief innovation officer of Sukup Innovations, at Maple Studios in West Des Moines. This collaborative effort marks a continuation of Pappajohn's vision to create an ecosystem that fosters entrepreneurship, particularly in Iowa's rural communities.

Other colleges and universities have also expressed interest in participating in the annual Iowa Student Entrepreneurship Conference in 2025.

Sponsored by John Pappajohn and Equity Dynamics Inc., the Pappajohn Student Entrepreneurial Venture Competition was intended for Iowa university and college students with an interest in starting their own business. Plans were judged based on a) content of plan

and b) viability of a business idea. Three seed grants in the amount of \$5,000 were awarded to the top three ventures who pitched in the final round. In addition, all finalists receive \$500 if not chosen for the top awards. The final competition was held on April 22 at the John Pappajohn Educational and Event Center in Des Moines.

Here are the three students who were awarded \$5,000 in seed money:

Instatat — Catherine Dow (North Iowa Area Community College)

Instatat revolutionizes the tattoo industry by offering a user-friendly platform for semi-permanent tattoos, integrating advanced AI technology to instantly create the perfect design. Combining this innovative approach with premium materials like GPE, Instatat ensures vibrant and long-lasting designs without the lifelong commitment of traditional tattoos and empowers individuals to express their authentic identities.

DC Outdoor Services — Davan Crooker (University of Northern Iowa)

DC Outdoor Services is a landscaping construction company with a mission to provide high-quality landscaping services with the utmost integrity. They offer patio installations, retaining wall installations, as well as general landscaping. Equipped to do projects of any size, DC Outdoor Services is your go-to landscaping provider.

Regain Orthotics — Joy Clark (Drake University)

Regain Orthotics provides a low-cost functional prosthetic to individuals living with above-elbow limb loss. Each A.R.M. Device is sold as a kit, designed for fabrication on site without the need for a skilled prosthetist, allowing the end-user to customize, maintain and repair their device with common household or hardware store materials. The unique design combines practicality, affordability and accessibility, putting the A.R.M. Device within reach of patients in need globally, from war-torn Gaza to a United States trauma center. ■

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP ROW:

The three students awarded seed money (from left to right) Davan Crooker, Catherine Dow and Joy Clark.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM ROW, LEFT: **Joy Clark demonstrates Regain Orthotics, which provides an inexpensive prosthetic to those with above-elbow limb loss.**

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM ROW, RIGHT: **Catherine Dow pitches Instatat, which offers a user-friendly platform for semi-permanent tattoos.** SUBMITTED PHOTOS