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Battery-free tracking device wins Startup Weekend 11

By [LISA HORNING](#) | October 17, 2017 12:42 pm



The team behind Pascal were winners of Startup Weekend 11. From left are Beau Muniz of Giddy, Lance Hall, Taylor Fatheree, Liam Spencer, Branden Young, Tim Burton, Scott Benton and Startup Weekend Organizer Paul Blakeley. | Photo by Lisa Hornung

Within one 54-hour weekend, six people worked to create a new type of item-tracking device that doesn't require batteries. The group made prototypes of the tracker they called Pascal,

created a logo, visited companies for feedback and got more than 300 responses to a survey.

The judges liked that the concept had the broadest appeal and was a “stand-out idea,” said Paul Blakeley, organizer of [Louisville’s Startup Weekend 11](#). Tim Burton and Scott Benton, who were on the winning team, said the device was like many other item trackers on the market, “but better.” Item trackers are tags that you can put on your keys, your wallet or whatever you often misplace, and find them with the help of an app on your phone. They usually require small batteries that have to be replaced regularly.

About 35 people pitched their ideas Friday, and five final groups pitched to the “sharks,” or really, judges. Judges were Amanda Dougherty, founder and owner of The New Blak; Melissa Chipman, freelance journalist and Insider contributor who has covered startups; and Reanna Smith-Hamblin, president and CEO of the Better Business Bureau Louisville.

Startup Weekend is an entrepreneurship incubator that anyone can join, either with an idea or not, and participate in a long weekend of creating a business from scratch. The participants have 54 hours in which to work on ideas, find potential customers and plan a new business with the help of facilitators, business mentors and other volunteers.

This year’s event was at the PNC Gigabit Experience Center at 13th Street and Muhammad Ali Boulevard. Mayor Greg Fischer even stopped by, Blakeley said. “(He was) talking with teams, trying to give them a little bit of advice. He wasn’t here to speak, he wasn’t here for photo opps, he was just here as an entrepreneur, to give back.”

Blakeley said he was very happy with the high number of first-time attendees, too. “We have a good number of students from UofL, entrepreneurship MBA students, the entrepreneurship club.”

This time Startup Weekend teamed up with Giddy, a microbusiness app created by employees of GE Appliance’s FirstBuild. The app allowed the teams to update their progress throughout the event and will now allow organizers to see how things developed over the weekend.

Not every participant comes to the event with an idea, said Austin Lopesilvero, an organizer. Some join because they have a specific skill set that they think would be helpful to entrepreneurs or they just want to be a part of creating a business.

“Oftentimes (teams) may find out that what they think is this great idea is not exactly what the customer wants, so the idea shifts,” Lopesilvero said. “This all comes down to Sunday night where they pitch to judges, kind of ‘Shark Tank’-style.”

While the judges aren’t giving the teams money, like the do on the TV show, they are choosing the winner of the prize package. The package includes six months of full-time membership at Story Louisville, a JUMP Agency consultation, business formation consulting with the law firm Fort Phelps, CPA consulting with DMLO CPAs, a Perfect Your Pitch session with The Speaker’s Studio and a Pitch at Open Coffee the Monday after the event. And, of course, a cool trophy.

All the prizes in the package are meant to help the team further their business idea, and several from past Startup Weekends have gone on to get their businesses launched or are still working on them.

One such participant is Wes Eklund, who volunteered for the weekend. He and his team are now going through the Nucleus Launch-It program through the University of Louisville. His team created [LifeBit](#), a wearable alert system for the deaf and hard of hearing, which was the winner of the 10th Startup Weekend last spring, and went on to win the Alumni Prize at Venture Sharks.

“Startup Weekend is by far my most favorite thing to do on a weekend,” Eklund. “I want to help young entrepreneurs get started.”

The weekend, he said, is stressful but fun. “That type of pressure and excitement, there’s very few things that in my mind emotionally compete. You have to work with a team, build team cohesion, find customers, make a product, make a slide deck and pitch to judges; and at every Startup Weekend I’ve gone to, I’ve become really good friends with my team, even afterwards.”

Participants Chris Simmons, Trinity Wilson and Alisia McClain. Wilson’s idea made it to a team, but wasn’t picked in the finals. | Photo by Lisa Hornung

Trinity Wilson, 17, is a senior at duPont Manual High School, and came to the event with an idea that was chosen for a group project. Her team created a website that was similar to

GoFundMe or PayPal, but is specifically for paying for college.

“I made it for people who needed an extra push, for people who didn’t have the same advantages (as others) and they still wanted to go to college,” Wilson said. “I just wanted to make it a really universal but simple way to use this money to go to school.”

Chris Simmons, an IT project manager, was on Wilson’s team. He was excited about the project and said he really hopes the project continues. Simmons didn’t come to Startup Weekend with an idea. “I wanted to be a part of something that was innovative, and I’ve been interested in entrepreneurship for quite a while,” he said. “I had trouble coming up with ideas of my own that were good, solid ideas.” But he believes in Wilson’s idea.

The team encountered a “technical glitch,” they said, and didn’t place in the finals. But they were still encouraged enough that they hope to continue the project.

One volunteer came by on Saturday to help participants with their ideas is Ben Marcum, owner of Ben Marcum Photography. He came to help out with the knowledge he gained from starting and building his own business.

“It’s exciting that we’ve got this in Louisville,” Marcum said. “To have this much startup business energy in our little city is really amazing, and I’m excited to see where it’s going to go.”

Startup Weekend 11 participants,
volunteers, organizers and judges pose
for a picture just before winners were
announced Sunday evening. | Photo by
Lisa Hornung

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Lisa Hornung a native of Louisville and has worked in local media for more than 15 years as a writer and editor. Before that she worked as a writer, editor and photographer for community newspapers in Kansas, Ohio and Kentucky. She

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