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## BUSINESSES

# LullaFeed wins Venture Sharks prize with plans to help babies eat

By [LISA HORNING](#) | May 7, 2018 8:00 am



Michael Detmer holds his check for winning Venture Sharks on Wednesday morning. Also pictured, from left: Allen Morris, Jackie Willmot, Jessica Sharon, Rebecca Brown, Paula Bates and Sarah Andres. | Photo courtesy Michael Detmer.

LullaFeed, a baby bottle device that uses music reinforcement to encourage infants to drink from the bottle, has won the Venture Sharks pitch contest and a \$20,000 prize.

The company behind LullaFeed,

**LullaFeed**™

[Innovative Therapeutix](#), was founded and is run by two medical professionals who saw a need for a product. Michael Detmer, a music therapist and professor, and Rebekah Gossom, a speech-language pathologist, work together with newborns in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Norton Women and Children's Hospital and Norton Children's Hospital.

They came up with the prototype of a feeding system, LullaFeed, that uses music to encourage infants and children who are hesitant to feed from a bottle, for various reasons.

The other finalists were: [Desicorp](#), developer of a dried blood transfusion unit; [MyNurse](#), a mobile platform that enables patients and families to easily find a caregiver in real-time by geolocation; [Parasite ID LLC](#), developer of Lice Detector, a test strip for lice; and [Agent Ally](#), winner of the [2018 Startup Weekend](#), which is working on a plan to streamline Medicare software.



Michael Detmer,  
music therapist and  
co-founder of  
Innovative  
Therapeutix. | Photo  
courtesy of  
Innovative  
Therapeutix

Venture Sharks is a “Shark Tank”-style contest in which companies pitch their ideas hoping to win funding and help from professionals to move their company forward. It's put on by Venture Connectors, a nonprofit organization formed in 1995 to bring entrepreneurs and investors together in a

professional but relaxed forum. This is Venture Sharks' ninth year.

The audience was invited to choose its favorite finalist via text voting at the finals. Innovative Therapeutix also took home audience favorite award and received \$695 raised (minus processing fees) via an Audience Participation Crowd Funding Campaign.

John Williamson, Venture Connectors president-elect, said the applicants are increasingly more qualified every year and found that more companies "were beyond the idea-on-a-napkin stage, which is exciting to see," Williamson said. "I think that's a level that's increased each year, which pushes up the level to get into the preliminaries and to get out of the preliminaries."

## Helping babies eat

Detmer and Gossom work with infants and babies who for lots of reasons aren't eating properly.

For example, at his role in the NICU, Detmer said: "We use music paired with touch and then rocking to help premature infants with sensory integration so that they become more tolerant of handling, so they're not in such a stressed state during standard NICU treatment, because that is directly associated with slower brain growth."

"I do a lot of hands-on work with them, and music is the agent



Rebekah Gossom, speech-language pathologist and co-founder of Innovative Therapeutix. | Photo courtesy Innovative Therapeutix

that keeps them calm while we introduce touch and movement to sort of rewire their responses to be more adaptive.”

(LullaFeed is not designed for NICU patients or premature babies, nor will it be an FDA approved medical device to be used in the NICU.)

Detmer said he also does a lot of parent education, teaching them how to handle their “tiny tot coming out of the isolette, with all those wires and tubes,” he said. Parents can be hesitant and nervous about handling their premature baby.

“I love to see parents’ eyes light up when they see a positive response from their baby or improved behaviors from a baby — it’s very exciting for me,” Detmer said. “As a NICU music therapist, it’s thrilling to add that to our interaction and my work with parents because music adds structure, and it also empowers the parents to interact on a deeper level with their baby.”

Detmer and Gossom were frustrated that there isn’t a “gold standard” of care for babies who refuse to take a bottle.

“Parents are constantly asking us what to do, even our fellow colleagues and friends who are having children are asking us what to do, and the only answer right now is to go to Babies ‘R Us or BuyBuy Baby and try a new nipple or try a new bottle or position or change formulas or change the temperature of the milk. There’s not an evidence-based solution to the problem,” he said.

So the pair hit the books, reading a lot of medical literature about the issue.

“We found that based on all the literature that we reviewed, this is an evidence-based solution,” Detmer said. “And it will be the very first solution that we can tell parents that we know this thing works, and you can go purchase it and it will encourage your baby to drink from the bottle.”

## Pitching, hitting and running

During the competition, Detmer had to make the presentation alone because Gossom couldn’t make the finals. He made his four-minute presentation with the prototype, and it worked. The company won \$5,000 in cash and \$15,000 of in-kind services.

“Michael and I just started out with what we thought was a really great idea and it’s really taken off,” Gossom said. “We’re really fortunate to have all the opportunities here in Louisville to make our dreams happen. This community is very supportive of entrepreneurs and innovation, and we’ve just been really happy with the results we’ve had in this community trying to bring a new idea to market.”

Now the pair has to move the idea forward, which is no easy task for a couple of medical professionals. They have filed for two provisional patents on the prototype, and will soon file a third as they revise the device a little more. They hope to begin looking at manufacturers this summer and have the LullaFeed, whose name they trademarked, available for sale by January 2019.

Gossom said she’s excited for the future. “I wasn’t there for it yesterday, but Michael filled me in on how wonderful it was, and I knew he would do great,” she said. “And I think everybody is very supportive of our product because it’s going to help babies thrive.”

*This post has been updated to correct a quote from Michael Detmer regarding the isolette and to point out that LulaFeed is not designed for NICU patients or premature babies, nor will it be an FDA approved medical device to be used in the NICU.*

## **LISA HORNUNG**

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 has a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Georgia, and after a 20-year career in journalism, she obtained a master’s degree in history from Eastern Kentucky University in 2016.



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