

M&T Bank Announces Winners of Capital Region Multicultural Small Business Lab Pitch Competition

Josue Osorto received the \$6,000 grand prize to support his business, Bespoke Vending

HARRISBURG, Pa., June 28, 2023 -- Josue Osorto, founder of Bespoke Vending, won the \$6,000 grand prize of the pitch competition held June 21 to culminate the second annual Capital Region Multicultural Small Business Lab, sponsored by M&T Bank.

Osorto, a 34-year-old son of El Salvadoran immigrants, started his vending machine company that sells popular, trending, nostalgic and hard-to-find snacks from around the world in September 2022. The former hospitality industry worker plans to use the prize money to buy new vending machines and launch a website for Bespoke Vending.

"My experience with the Multicultural Small Business Lab has been more than I ever thought was possible and an absolute game-changer," Osorto said. "The immense value and assistance provided by M&T and everyone they included in the business lab are truly indescribable. The knowledge and support offered through this program have proven to be of immeasurable benefit, exceeding any initial expectations."

The pitch competition capped the seven-week business accelerator program that launched May 10 in partnership with the Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (CIE) at Harrisburg University of Science and Technology. The Capital Region Multicultural Small Business Lab focused on business planning, establishing credit, accessing capital, marketing, branding and networking. Courses were held each Wednesday evening at Harrisburg University.

Corey Dupree, owner of Men Raising Black Boys, earned the pitch competition's second-place prize of \$4,000. BreAna Blount, owner of Bre's Eats-n-Sweets, won the third-place prize of \$2,000.

Other participants in the pitch competition included Leslie Avila, owner of DelightFull Wellness, Tiffiney L. Hall, owner of PosiTiff Touch Health and Wellness, and Jazmin Slaughter, owner of A Hint of Jazz Management.

The Capital Region Multicultural Small Business Lab was offered to Greater Harrisburg entrepreneurs who met the following eligibility requirements:

- Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx or Asian American;
- In business no more than three years;
- Annual business revenue of \$350,000 or less; and,
- Reside in the Greater Harrisburg area.

Nearly 40 entrepreneurs participated in this year's Multicultural Small Business Lab – the sixth in a series of programs launched by M&T Bank in Buffalo, N.Y., in 2021 to help multicultural small businesses access resources and expand their knowledge.

"The Capital Region Multicultural Small Business Lab empowers Greater Harrisburg's entrepreneurs and provides their small businesses with the resources to grow," said Nora Habig, M&T's regional president for Central and Western Pennsylvania. "Supporting small businesses remains at the core of M&T, and we're proud to invest in diverse small businesses within the Harrisburg community."

The first Capital Region Multicultural Small Business Lab launched in 2022, providing 40 minority small-business owners with free access to resources and education to grow their business. Three participants of last year's program also won \$10,000 in total funding from M&T through a business pitch competition. Last year's Capital Region Multicultural Small Business Lab received the 2022 Catalyst Award from the Harrisburg Regional Chamber and Capital Region Economic Development Corporation for its impact on businesses in the area.

The Capital Region Multicultural Small Business Lab is an outcome of focus group meetings M&T held with various multicultural community leaders who described the challenges their communities face when launching and growing businesses in the region.

"The main reason multicultural small businesses fail is because they lack an ecosystem around them that supports and promotes their growth," said David Femi, head of M&T Bank's Multicultural Banking & Diverse Market Strategy. "I'm proud to work for an organization that is committed to fostering the development of that ecosystem through programs like the Capital Region Multicultural Small Business Lab."

To learn more about M&T's efforts to support small business diversity, please visit [M&T Multicultural Banking](#).

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About the Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (CIE) at Harrisburg University

The Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (CIE) empowers innovators to build successful ventures, including Harrisburg University students and faculty, as well as entrepreneurs in the community. In addition, CIE offers opportunities for partners to invest in important scientific discoveries, technological innovations, and academic research.

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