

# Rotary District 5495

## District Grant Final Report

Due April 30, 2025 – Complete at Conclusion of Project

Project Title: Rotary Means Business Shrk Tank

Rotary Club of: Mesa West

Person Completing this form: GE Paulus President 2024-2025

Email: [gpaulus@asu.edu](mailto:gpaulus@asu.edu)

### Project Description

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1. Briefly describe the project outcomes. What was done (in 100 words or less)? Our club help its Shark Tank equivalent called Igniting Innovation on March 27th from 5:00 PM to 9:00 pm which was open to the public. We had more than 35 applicants to participate in the Igniting Innovation Event and our judges selected the top five entrepreneurial companies to present to a distinguished panel of judges who selected the top two companies to be awarded the coveted prize of \$5000 to the 1st place company and \$1000 dollars was awarded to the second place company. The judging was based on a comprehensive rubric that the judges evaluated each of the five finalists. The evening was well attended by forty to sixty guests.

The top Finalists were:

Micheal Li and Benjamin Voller-Brown: Ethereal Co

Vishwas Gopala Krishna and Sreekar Chitti: EMVO/ChatPot

Revi Teja Chopparapu, Jayaram Atluri, Sai Bhuvana Kurada: Bliss ARC

Shashwat Raj and Kenisha Kaushal: Kavvy

Trent Ward, William Yeager, Nick Kenney, Thomas Drake, Izma Syed: HeatSense

When (dates) and where (city, state and country) did project activities take place?

March 27th from 5:00 pm – 9:00 Pm in Mesa, Arizona at the Studios @ Mesa City Center 59 E. 1st Street, Mesa, AZ 85201

Who were the beneficiaries?

Main Awardees: Micheal Li and Benjamin Voller-Brown: Ethereal Co

& Add'l Awardees:Trent Ward, William Yeager, Nick Kenney, Thomas Drake, Izma Syed: HeatSense

2. How many Rotarians participated in the project? 20

3. What did they do? Judges both primary and secondary. Planning, Coordinating, Mentoring Please give at least two examples. Kayla Mudge PE was an in person judge along with three other judges including Neil Theobald our Rotarian who was past president of the University of Wyoming and Toni Thompson, Rotary Member Spouse who is the president of American University. In addition, Pam Cohen and Jay Paulus coordinated the evening and acted as the masters of ceremonies at the event.

4. How many non-Rotarians benefited from this project? Two corporation and over 50 visitors saw the good that Rotary does withing the community. See article attached. Also Rotary was highlighted in the local newspaper Mesa Tribune.
  
1. What are the expected long-term community impacts of the project? We expect that these entrepreneurs will use the funds to foster their endeavors and may donated back to the club and or become new members of our Rotary Club. The awardee companies will be presenting to the club in June and will provide a discuss of the impact these grants made on their companies. Mesa West Rotary is part of a global network of business leaders dedicated to giving back to their communities through mentorship, funding, and service. Their involvement in the Venture Challenge is a testament to their commitment to fostering the next generation of entrepreneurs while strengthening local economies said ASU.

The event, coordinated by Mesa West Rotary, ASU Edson E+I and sponsors such as the Mesa Business Builder, attracted a diverse audience of over 50 community members, students, university leaders, and Rotarians, all eager to support the finalists. A judging panel comprised of Mesa West Rotary members and a City of Mesa Economic Development employees awarded the \$5,000 grand prize to Michael Li of Ethereal Co. for presenting a scalable venture with significant local impact. In a surprise move, the Rotary also granted a \$1,000 award to the HeatSense team, recognizing their strong potential for growth.

2. If a cooperating organization was involved, what was its role? Arizona State University Edson Center and the City of Mesa Economic Development Office. Their roles included planning the flow of show, managing the application process and coordinating the training for the judges. The City of Mesa donated \$1000 to help offset our Rotary Expenses which ultimately allowed us to give two awards that evening.

**Financial Report** (Use second page, if needed. District must receive receipts of all expenditures)

3. Income      Amount

1. District Grant funds received from the District	\$2500
2. Club funds	\$3300
3. Other funding (specify) City of Mesa Economic Development	\$1000
4. Other funding (specify) In-kind Contributions Facilities, drinks and staff time	In-Kind
<b>Total Project Income</b>	<b>\$6800</b>

4. Expenditures (please be specific)

1. \$6000 Awards to Entrepreneur Corporations	\$6000
2. \$800 Food for the evening	\$800
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4. Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
5. Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
6. Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
<b>Total Project Expenditures</b>	<b>\$6800</b>

Income and expenditures must balance.

By signing this report, I confirm that to the best of my knowledge these District Grant funds were spent only for eligible items in accordance with Trustee-approved guidelines, and that all the information contained herein is true and accurate.

Club President Signature: 

Date: 4/23/2025

Club President printed name: GE Paulus  
Email: gpaulus@asu.edu



April 01, 2025 ASU Article

The Edson E+I Igniting Innovation Venture Challenge, held on March 27, marked the exciting finale of the three-part Edson E+I Creative Tech Innovation Series. This dynamic event brought together Arizona State University (ASU) students, faculty, staff, and the East Valley's creative tech community to celebrate the intersection of emerging technology, entrepreneurship, and the creative arts.

Designed to foster collaboration and innovation, the series included in-depth discussions, interactive sessions, and a panel with Stephanie Tomlin, Director of Industry Relations at the MIX Center. It concluded with a welcome by Jaye O'Donnall, Mesa's Economic Development Director, and a thrilling pitch competition. With a \$5,000 seed funding opportunity created by the Mesa West Rotary Club, the competition provided emerging entrepreneurs with a platform to refine their ideas and build meaningful connections with experienced business leaders and mentors.

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The event, coordinated by ASU Edson E+I and sponsored by Mesa Business Builder, attracted a diverse audience of over 50 community members, students, university leaders, and Rotarians, all eager to support the finalists. A judging panel comprised of Mesa West Rotary members and City of Mesa employees awarded the \$5,000 grand prize to Michael Li of Ethereal Co. for presenting a scalable venture with significant local impact. In a surprise move, the Rotary also granted a \$1,000 award to the HeatSense team, recognizing their strong potential for growth.

Peter Costa, an established Mesa creative entrepreneur who exemplifies the local culture and CEO of Baltu Technologies, delivered an inspiring fireside chat while the judges deliberated, offering finalists valuable insights and encouragement as they embark on their journeys as both creatives and problem solvers.

"The City of Mesa has been laying the foundation for an Innovation District for years, working diligently to put the right resources in place," said Kristin Slice, Director of ASU Edson E+I Community Entrepreneurship. "ASU Edson E+I has been embedded in the local Mesa community for many years,

supporting entrepreneurs through initiatives like the Creative Tech Innovation Series. These programs spotlight local innovators, connect them with mentors and resources, and celebrate the visionaries solving today's biggest challenges while staying rooted in their communities. The intersection of local mentorship and active entrepreneurial engagement has resulted in a deeply impactful program."

As part of ASU's mission to be socially embedded, the university plays a key role in fostering innovation districts by creating unique and engaging opportunities for entrepreneurs to connect with business leaders. ASU leverages its research on entrepreneurship to facilitate these meaningful collisions, ensuring that students and community members alike have access to the resources they need to succeed. This aligns with the ASU Charter, which states: *ASU is a comprehensive public research university, measured not by whom it excludes, but by whom it includes and how they succeed; advancing research and discovery of public value; and assuming fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural and overall health of the communities it serves.* The Creative Tech Innovation Series embodies this mission by providing students with hands-on entrepreneurial experiences and exposing community members to new, innovative ideas and technologies.

The 5 finalists for the challenge were:

- Micheal Li and Benjamin Voller-Brown: [Ethereal Co](#)
- Vishwas Gopala Krishna and Sreekar Chitti: EMVO/ChatPot
- Revi Teja Chopparapu, Jayaram Atluri, Sai Bhuvana Kurada: [Bliss ARC](#)
- Shashwat Raj and Kenisha Kaushal: [Kavvy](#)
- Trent Ward, William Yeager, Nick Kenney, Thomas Drake, Izma Syed: [HeatSense](#)

Country: USA

Location: Mesa, AZ

Total Budget: \$6800

Area of Focus: Community economic development

Activity Type: Community Development: General

Summary: 'Rotary Shark Tank' in coordination with Arizona State University J. Orin Edson Entrepreneurship + Innovation Institute--Helping to Turn Our Local Student's Ideas into a Viable Business Venture

#### MESA WEST ROTARY "SHARK TANK" FOR LOCAL YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

The basis for the Mesa West Rotary "Shark Tank" is similar to the multi-Emmy winning Shark Tank show that helps entrepreneurs with business ideas launch their products to the market. Mesa West Rotary "Shark Tank" will have a panel of five evaluators from our Mesa West Rotary Club acting as "investors" called "sharks," who will decide which of the three to four pitch presenting and invited entrepreneurs will win the coveted Rotary Shark Tank award.

The award will support the business through the purchase of tools, equipment, material or inventory needed by the company in order to advance their company idea as they bring their idea or product to market. The non-monetary "equipment" award will be up to \$5000.00 equivalent to one/two of the

three or four entrepreneurial companies making the "best" pitch. Each pitch will be assessed based on a decision and evaluation rubric supplied by Arizona State University with our Rotary Club's final input.

We have spoken with Arizona State University in Mesa and they have agreed (with Rotary's participation) to select the final three or four student companies to make the pitches. Our intent is to hold the "Rotary Shark Tank" social in October 2024.

The entrepreneur team will essentially make business presentations on their company or product along with an ask. The panel of "Rotary Sharks" will pose questions, make observations based on the entrepreneur's product, business model or valuation of their company. After all presentations are finished, the panel will select one or two entrepreneurs to "fund" with their needed equipment, tools or materials.

The intent of our Rotary Grant is to help launch ingenious business ideas so that these young professionals can be successful in their ventures. The hope is that many people's lives will be better off - because they dared to enter the unpredictable waters of our Rotary "Shark Tank."

Each pitch will last approximately 30 minutes and "the drama of pitch meeting and the interaction between the entrepreneurs and our Mesa West Rotarians" will be quite rewarding to all. Club members not on the evaluation panel will act as the "audience." The pitch will be around 30 minutes by each entrepreneur team of up to five pitches per our session.

Our other Rotary club members will be invited to observe the presentation as if they were the studio audience. Prior to and after all the pitches are completed, the Rotarians and all of the Entrepreneurial businesses will have a social to meet in person with our club Rotarians. This interaction and discussion of the entrepreneur's idea may also result in what we are referring to as the Shark Tank effect. Simply by appearing in front of our Rotary Club even without getting selected as the awardee will have the potential to significantly boost awareness and possibly sales for the entrepreneurial companies portrayed. This effect caused by the media and those observing the Shark Tank is referred to as the "Shark Tank Effect."

In summary, Mesa West Rotary Club will hold a social evening for our club members at the club's expense and will host a "Rotary Shark Tank," where our club and our five member panel will listen to the entrepreneur's pitches and select one or two awardees at the end of the night based on their set of evaluation criteria.

At the end of the pitches all Rotarians present will have a social opportunity and an opportunity for the entrepreneurs through a meet and greet to discuss their company, ambitions and future. Who knows, a Rotarian from the club might like to work with the team to help them come to market more quickly via mentoring or otherwise.

It should be noted that Arizona State University will be partnering with Rotary on this and that they will provide training for the "Judges", supply a draft Rubric for judging, provide access to their software for the entrepreneur applications, provide food in kind, coordinate the "Run of Show," supply the space for

the evening at no cost, advertise the project, craft a joint media release and assist our Mesa West Rotary with the evening audio and visual requirements.

In the end, this project should be fun for all and provide a direct benefit to our community. It is also in direct alignment with our District Governor's Theme "Rotary Means Business."

Project Contact Person

District: 5495

Rotary Club of: Mesa West

Primary Contact: Gerry Paulus

Email: gpaulus@asu.edu

Project Status

Paid

This project is "Paid". This means that the funds from the district have been issued. This project has been implemented. When this is done, a final report will be uploaded on the project page and the "Reported" button needs to be clicked, then the status of the project will be changed to "Reported".

Project listed for the 2024-25 Rotary Year.