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Innovative approach to aircraft parts wins funding in Lever contest



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From left to right, Brent Filson; Evaguel Rhysing, United Aircraft Technologies co-founder and CEO; Daryian Rhysing, United Aircraft Technologies co-founder and CTO; and Jeffrey Thomas.

PHOTO BY MARC J. WRZESINSKI

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The three other finalists included:

- SurfSix, an innovative new motion-capture system for researchers studying the biomechanical process of human and animal systems. SurfSix's founder, Jebb Remelius, is from Pittsfield and has a Ph.D. in Motor Control and Biomechanics from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

- TransPharm, which is seeking to build a vending system to dispense over-the-counter

By Scott Stafford, The Berkshire Eagle

NORTH ADAMS — A company working to manufacture an airplane part that could save fuel, money and lives has been named the recipient of a \$25,000 grant in the latest entrepreneurial challenge organized by Lever Inc.

According to Brent Filson, director of programs and operations at Lever, four finalists were selected in October. They have been competing since then for award funding from the Berkshire Manufacturing Innovation Challenge focusing on the life sciences offered by Lever.

Lever is a North Adams-based nonprofit working to grow an entrepreneurial

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medicines in underserved regions of the world that may not have reliable sources of electricity. The TransPharm co-founders are Abhishek Ram, Aashish Kumar, Nila Sadeeshkumar, and Siddhartha Srivastava from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

- Alston Posture. The founders of the company have created a wearable training tool to assist individuals in finding and maintaining a neutral spine while performing key manual labor job tasks in the workplace. Alston Postur was founded by Brad Roblin, owner/operator of Pro Workforce Performance, and Joseph Antoine Alston, inventor of the Alston Method.

ecosystem in the Berkshire-Bennington region. It supports entrepreneurs with expertise, low-cost office space, an investment fund, research, mentors, and access to talent through the Berkshire Business Interns program.

The winning company, United Aircraft Technologies Inc., is developing a clamp to be used on wiring harnesses in aircraft. They are made of plastic, unlike the metal clamps in use in all aircraft today. The new clamps are one-fifth the weight of the metal clamp, reducing an aircraft's weight by hundreds or thousands of pounds, depending on the size of the craft.

The metal clamps are used to harness the many wires running through an aircraft and keep them from tangling or breaking. They need to be physically screwed into bulkheads to keep them stabilized. This process is time-consuming and requires screws, washers and brackets — more unnecessary weight.

According to Evaguel Rhysing, CEO and founder of United Aircraft Technologies, the developer of the new part, her husband Daryian Rhysing, was an aircraft mechanic for 20 years and did two tours of duty with the U.S.

Army in the Middle East. After years of manually installing metal clamps with screws, he suffered from carpal tunnel syndrome, ending his aircraft maintenance career.

So Rhysing enrolled at RPI and studied engineering, where he developed the new clamp.

The new parts are manufactured to snap into its housing, eliminating the need for screws, parts and untold labor costs, along with preserving the health of aircraft mechanics. Less weight would mean less fuel needed, and reduce the risk of mishaps.

Evaguel Rhysing noted that the award money will allow them to produce prototypes for further testing, having a deal in place with a Dalton-based injection plastic molding company. She said they entered the challenge because "Lever seems like a good program that could give us good contacts and keep us moving forward."

It turns out that United Aircraft Technologies has been seeing interest in their part from members of the industry, including a defense contractor that builds helicopters for the U.S. military.

Evaguel Rhysing said the \$25,000 grant will give them some further momentum. "It will help us on developing our business through the prototyping phase to get the part molded and on to testing," she said.

Filson noted that during the challenge, Untied Aircraft has been creating synergies with other local businesses.

"They have really become ingrained in our region," he said.

The companies were evaluated based on the application the product would have in life sciences, whether there is high growth potential, and the likelihood that it will attract investment capital and create jobs in the Western Massachusetts/Southwestern Vermont region.

This was the first entrepreneurial challenge funded by \$450,000 in grant funding awarded to Lever in August, Filson said.

As a result of the funding, Lever has launched two new challenge programs to boost entrepreneurs and innovative startups in the region. The new programs will award a total of \$150,000 in seed grants each for winners in manufacturing and health challenges in the Berkshire region over the next three years.

Next up is the Berkshire Health Technology Challenge, which will award another \$25,000 grant in May.

There will be four more challenges — two per year for the next two years. Each year, one will be in advanced manufacturing and the other in health sciences, Filson said. The grant funding comes from a mix of state, private, and nonprofit sources from both inside and outside Berkshire County.

Organizations interested in sponsoring Lever's efforts or participating in a challenge can contact Filson at Lever at bfilson@lever.org.

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