

PartyRVA tops i.e.* startup competition finals

By JACOB GEIGER Richmond Times-Dispatch | Posted: Tuesday, May 12, 2015 10:30 pm

A parade of princesses and a wicked witch wearing hundreds of balloons helped PartyRVA win the grand prize Tuesday night at the Greater Richmond Chamber's i.e.Startup Competition.

As a cast of costumed characters marched behind him at Richmond CenterStage, founder Nate Marcus explained how his business simplifies party planning.

The company, which launched in January, is already booking several parties a week, in categories ranging from corporate team building to late-night bachelorette parties.

PartyRVA took home \$10,000 after eight judges named it the region's best startup. One judge called Marcus' presentation the "first 90-second circus I've ever seen."

Another \$10,000 prize, sponsored by The Community Foundation, went to CodeVA, which was voted the best social innovation startup. Rebecca Dovi, a teacher who helped co-found CodeVA with her husband, Chris, said the group wants to make computer science education available to high school students across Virginia.

By the end of this summer, CodeVA plans to train more than 200 school teachers in computer science curricula. CodeVA also offers summer camps and training classes for students.

"Through our training of local teachers, they impact thousands of students," she said.

Chrystal Neal, the chamber's vice president of innovation, said the new award was created because the past three years of the competition have drawn so many businesses that wanted to give back to the community.

The 14 finalists were chosen from 54 entrants in an online vote. Winners in both grand prizes will receive mentoring and six months of office space from New Richmond Ventures as well as \$1,500 in technology support from GroundWork Design.

The startup businesses spanned a wide range of products, from watches to medical software to organic juice.

The people's choice award, which carries a \$2,500 prize, went to Ginger Juice, an organic juice company started by Erin Powell.

Hamoon Hadavand told the audience that his love of watches and his desire to feed malnourished children led him to found WatchForChange. The company's three watches sell for about \$75, and additional watchbands cost \$20.



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Nate Marcus, left foreground, of Party RVA, pitched his business to the judges and audience during 2015 i.e.* competition at Richmond CenterStage on Tuesday, May 12. Party RVA won Region's Best Startup.

Hadavand donates 20 percent of the proceeds from each sale to charities that provide food or clean water to children.

“Trust me folks, your Rolex won’t do that,” Hadavand said.

Competing for best startup were Before3 Inc., Ginger Juice, Marilyn & Michelle, MedNav Inc., PartyRVA, Richmond Rides Bicycle Tours and SecuriChecks.

Competing for the best social innovation startup were BrushForGood.org, CodeVA, News Network Jr., Teer’d, Uvest Solar, VocalLocal and WatchForChange.

The event’s judges were Marti Beller, co-founder of PlanG; Vanessa Diamond, director and co-founder of HandsOn Greater Richmond and vice president of the Partnership for Nonprofit Excellence; Maurice A. Jones, Virginia secretary of commerce and trade; Will Loving, CEO of Altron Corp.; Aaron Montgomery, co-founder and COO of CarLotz Inc.; Shawn Boyer, founder of Snagajob and founder of Gazzow and DieHappy; Ting Xu, founder of Evergreen Enterprises; and Samuel Young, president and co-founder of Astyra Corp.