

**NEW YORK STATE
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
ASSISTANCE CENTERS
2021 Annual Conference**



Small Businesses Respond to Covid-19



Entrepreneurship Assistance Centers

EAC 2021 Annual Training and Awards Conference Program Journal



INTRODUCTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Entrepreneurship Assistance Centers (“EAC” or “Centers”) is an enterprise development program with centers in local communities throughout New York State. The EAC provide instruction, training, technical assistance and support services to individuals who have recently started their own business or are interested in starting a business and also strengthen the operation of these firms during the early stages of development, generally within the first five years.

PROGRAM REVIEW

The Omnibus Economic Development Law of 1987 established the original Entrepreneurial Assistance Program (EAP). In January of 2019, the law was amended, and the program was renamed Entrepreneurship Assistance Centers. The law authorizes the Department of Economic Development d/b/a Empire State Development (“ESD”), through the Entrepreneurship Assistance Centers (EAC” or the “Program” or “Centers”), to issue contracts to not-for-profit corporations, community colleges and boards of cooperative educational services for development of the Centers.

Encouraging the formation and growth of small businesses is an important strategic goal of New York State. EAC programs provide intensive, community-based training, technical assistance and other related services of small business owners or entrepreneurs, particularly minorities and women, to stimulate new businesses development and to strengthen businesses in the early stages of development - typically from one to five years. Such assistance is especially important in economically distressed areas where high levels of unemployment and declining infrastructure further limit the ability for these young businesses to develop. Effective programs are built on a working knowledge of the needs and resources of a community and its region.

Welcome to the 2021 EAC Annual Training and Awards Conference

Each year ESD convenes an annual training conference after the completion of each fiscal year to review the program’s effectiveness, compare best practices with national micro business programs as well as to provide an opportunity for Centers to exchange best practices.

This year the Centers asked for specific training in Learning Management Systems (LMS) so they could streamline the administrative chores of tracking student progress as well as provide a picture of the program’s effectiveness. While Google Classrooms may be a quasi LMS, it does provide online tools to for managing and tracking assignments. We are fortunate to have Mr. Bill Vacca, a certified Google Classroom Instructor and Assistant Principal of Mohonasen Central School District and publisher of multiple YouTube training videos that will give our trainers a permanent reference on best ways to implement and use this tool. Mr. Vacca extends the power of education beyond the school walls to advance the digital knowledge of parents and businesses in the local community.

Another request for training this year is on the use of the economic and business data that can be available for our client’s use in researching market and industry data to find customers. To get a firmer foothold on what to research, we are fortunate to have Noelia Ana Moussignac, Data Dissemination Specialist from the U.S. **Census** Bureau to show us how to mine their data. The Census Bureau produces **economic** data from across the entire U.S. economy on a monthly, quarterly, yearly, and five-year basis. The **census** is also **used** for marketing and storytelling by businesses, entrepreneurs, economic development leaders, **marketers**, communicators, and journalists to understand communities.

Storytelling is an especially needed and critical skill for our entrepreneurs to possess in pitching their business plans to investors, loan officers, and to their buying public. Underlining the need for our EAC trainers to enable clients on how to tell that story that not only sells but to bring it to life and grab the reader’s attention is Steve Melito. Founder and Co-Owner of Thunderbolt Business Services as well as FuzeHub’s Senior Solutions Specialist, Steve is the go-to storyteller. We are blessed that Steve has agreed to reveal the secrets of his trade.

Talking about business plans, the EACs oftentimes refer clients to the New York Public Library (NYPL) for help in extracting data for their business plans. The NYPL has been a reliable partner with our Business Plan Competitions. To talk to us about all the resources available to all residents of New York State is the very well informed and well versed, Ross Takahashi, Manager of Public Services.

Rounding out the training is our own team of program managers to review administrative and data collecting processes. This year we accomplished a long-desired need to upgrade the EAC database system. We can happily rejoice that we can now retire the old system after 25 years of use. The entirety of the data was successfully migrated through the colossal efforts of ESD's IT Development team - Bin Xie, ESD's Associate Director of Application Development; Maya Roskin, Senior Database Administrator; and Sergey Druyan, MS Dynamics Application Developer & Analyst. We will be spending time to work through what the EACs need for accessing the status of a client's progress. Our Program Manager, Jefferson Mao, has worked double time with ESD's very capable data analysts and management team, Elizabeth Torres, MS Dynamics Developer and System Administrator and Keith Foster, ESD's Data Warehouse Architect, who seems to organize humongous amounts of data in his sleep.

Last but not least is learning the many ways that the New York State Contract Reporter (NYSCR) can help the entrepreneur access additional sources of income. As we have always tried to provide entrepreneurs with other sources of funding to diversify their income streams, NYS government contracts this year have especially proven to be the only opportunity for some to survive the economic downturn caused by this pandemic. Please read our Entrepreneur Awardee stories to find out how some managed to not only survive but actually thrive using their MWBE certification for landing both government and corporate contracts. Christine McCann, ESD's Procurement Specialist has pulled together a special presentation to show how businesses can easily find ads for contract work in the NYSCR and what's more, how they might wish to place their own ads so they can be found by the contractors.

At the culmination of our year, we gather to honor and celebrate the Entrepreneurs we have been fortunate to work with and who make us very proud. This is also a time to recognize and celebrate Centers for excellence of performance in a fiscal year.



Please refer to the agenda for the 2021 EAC Annual Training and Awards Conference on the next page.

Following the agenda and after the note from our sponsor, NYSTAR, are the biographies of the speakers and an alphabetical roster of training presenter profiles. We conclude with the highlight of our conference featuring the success stories of our illustrious 2021 EAC Entrepreneurs-of-the-Year awardees.

2021 EAC ANNUAL TRAINING & AWARDS CONFERENCE AGENDA

Schedule	Presenter	Time
DAY 1: MONDAY – 10/18/2021	Google Classroom – Part I Set Up Bill Vacca, Director of Instructional Technology Center for Advanced Technology	9:00am – 10:30am
	ESD's Microsoft Dynamics Database Jefferson Mao, EAC Program Manager ESD IT TEAM	10:50am - Noon
	BREAK	
	U.S. Census – 2020 Data Available for Research Noelia Ana Moussignac, Data Dissemination Specialist	1:00pm – 2:30pm
	ESD Contract System – Finding NYS Contracts Christine McCann, Procurement Specialist	3:00pm – 4:00pm
DAY 2: TUESDAY – 10/19/2021	Google Classroom – Part II Pro Tools Bill Vacca, Director of Instructional Technology Center for Advanced Technology	9:00am- 10:30am
	Story Telling – How to Get Impact Steve Melito, Founder & Co-Owner, Thunderbolt Business Services	11:00am-12 noon
	BREAK	
	Business Model Canvas – Launch of new Curriculum Sharon Goldsmith, Acting Exec. Dean, Hofstra University Laura Fetter, Acting Vice Dean, Hofstra University	1:00pm – 2:00pm
	NY Public Library – Resources for All NY Ross Takahashi, Manager of Public Services	2:20pm 4:00 pm
DAY 3: AFTERNOON WEDNESDAY PM 10/20/2021 AWARDS PRESENTATION	2021 EAC AWARDS CEREMONY	1:30pm – 2:00pm Meet & Greet
	Martha Otero, Welcoming Remarks Vice President Entrepreneur Development & Operations	2:00pm – 4:00pm
	Pravina Raghavan, Emcee Executive Vice President Division of Small Business & Technology Development / Empire State Development	
	Jordan N. Taylor Sloan, ALM, Sponsor Entrepreneur Navigator NYSTAR	
	Entrepreneur-of-the-Year Awards Top EAC Performance Awards	

Thank you

NYSTAR

for supporting the
34th Annual Entrepreneurship Assistance Centers Award Ceremony



Empire State Development (ESD)'s Division of Science, Technology and Innovation (NYSTAR), part of the state's economic development agency, is tasked with advancing technology innovation and commercialization in New York State. NYSTAR plays an integral role in ESD's economic development strategy by overseeing funding for university research centers and by helping businesses through NYSTAR's Centers of Excellence, Centers for Advanced Technology, Manufacturing Extension Partnership centers, Innovation Hot Spots, New York State Certified Business Incubators, Science + Technology Law Center, and other assets. This approximately \$55 million portfolio of state-supported high-tech assets touches all points of the state's innovation economy, including but not limited to advanced materials, biotech and life sciences, renewable energy, materials processing, optics and imaging, software and digital media, and electronics technologies.

2021 Annual Conference and Awards Ceremony

SPEAKER & PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES



Pravina Raghavan,
*Executive Vice President,
Division of Small Business and
Technology Development
Empire State Development*

Pravina has over 20 years of worldwide experience in providing advisory services to businesses in the start-up, growth, expansion, and maturity phases of development. Pravina Raghavan is the Executive Vice President, Division of Small Business and Community Economic Development for Empire State Development (New York State). Prior to joining Empire State Development, Pravina was the Senior Advisor to the Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Commerce where she worked on a vast number of economic and operational issues across the Department of Commerce.

Preceding Pravina's estimable work with the Department of Commerce, she served as the Deputy Associate Administrator of Investment and Innovation at the U.S. Small Business Administration and was responsible for Small Business Investment Companies Program which provides investment funds to private equity funds with \$22 BN under management, Small Business Innovation Research Program (SBIR) and High Growth Entrepreneur initiatives. In addition to this she was also the District Director for SBA New York District Office which supported around \$1BN in small business lending and assisted over 3M small businesses in NYC.

Leading Pravina's entre to the federal government is her impressive track record in both the corporate and private sectors. She was a Vice President with MTV and BET Networks in Content Distribution and Marketing, where she was responsible for contract negotiations and marketing for 23 channels. Previously, she was a small business owner of a strategic advisory firm that assisted companies in their quest for growth.

Prior to owning her own business, Pravina was the Business Development Director for Misys PLC, one of the largest banking software companies in the world. She was also steeped in the operations of the international banking industry as an associate at an investment bank, Broadview International, in London. Prefacing her stint at Broadview, Pravina worked for seven years at AT&T in several finance and management roles, including her last five years as M&A Director for Europe.

Pravina has an MBA in Finance from Seton Hall University and a BS in Finance from Pennsylvania State University. She has worked in over 15 countries around the world and is familiar with five languages.

2021 Annual Conference and Awards Ceremony

SPEAKER & PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES



Jordan N. Taylor Sloan, ALM
*Entrepreneur Navigator
Division of Science, Technology,
and Innovation (NYSTAR)
Empire State Development*

Jordan Taylor Sloan is the Entrepreneurship Navigator for Empire State Development's Division of Science, Technology, and Innovation (NYSTAR). Jordan works with entrepreneurs and small businesses to efficiently engage with the NYSTAR network to support the commercialization of technology and scaling of business operations.

Jordan has worked at the State and Local levels of economic development throughout her career, leading the Small Business Center at the Nashville Chamber of Commerce and launching entrepreneurial support programs for the State of Tennessee's Dept. of Economic and Community Development. As a former entrepreneur, Jordan leverages her hands-on experience to assist organizations navigate systemic resources to fulfil operational priorities and support long-term community, environmental, and economic resiliency.

Jordan completed her master's in management at the Harvard Extension School where she graduated with honors for her work on the applications of the circular economy to private sector innovation and restorative economic policy. Her research was published in the Harvard Circular Economy Symposium and her capstone was awarded the Semi Finalist prize at the Harvard University President's Innovation Challenge.



Martha Otero
*Vice President
Entrepreneur Development &
Operations
Empire State Development*

For the past year and half, Martha has been overseeing the implementation of the Empire State Digital Initiative, Small Business Lease Assistance Program and the NYS COVID-19 Pandemic Small Business Recovery Grant Technical Assistance Program, and the development of other programs to assist entrepreneurs and micro and small business owners to start and grow in New York State. Prior to her current position, Martha was the Small Business Liaison and Marketing Outreach Coordinator. In that role she directed entrepreneurs and small business owners to the appropriate New York State funded programs and services to start and expand their business and to resolve issues affecting the operation of their business. As Director of the Puerto Rican and Latino Business Development Center for ten years, Martha assisted local development organizations to develop and manage programs to revitalize and strengthen the Latino business community. Martha enjoys being able to develop new programs that will assist entrepreneurs to successfully operate viable and sustainable businesses in New York State

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SPEAKER & PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES



Laura Fetter

*Acting Vice Dean
Entrepreneurship and Business
Development
Hofstra University
Scott Skodnek Business
Development Center (BDC)*

Laura Fetter is also Director for the Entrepreneurship Assistance Center (EAC) where she provides oversight of the program funded by Empire State Development that has been successfully operating at Hofstra University since 1991. Laura also assists with planning and implementing programs for entrepreneurs including training in QuickBooks accounting software and Digital Marketing for small businesses. She also provides technical assistance to business owners completing the New York State Minority/Women Owned Business Enterprise (M/WBE) application and performs analyses of applications submitted to Empire State Development through the Certification Assistance Program (CAP) grant. Prior to joining the BDC, Laura worked in the Office for Development as an Administrative Assistant and in the Office of Alumni Relations as a Senior Assistant. Laura earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Hofstra University.



Sharon Goldsmith, MBA

*Acting Executive Dean
Entrepreneurship and Business
Development
Hofstra University Institute for
Innovation and
Entrepreneurship
Scott Skodnek Business
Development Center (BDC)*

Sharon Goldsmith has twelve years of combined experience in the business management and entertainment industry and over four years in higher education. Sharon graduated from the University of Rhode Island in 2003 with a degree in Public Relations and immediately joined LL Business Management, Inc. For almost three years, she was a business manager for recording artists, NBA players and other high net worth individuals. Her most famous client, 50 Cent, asked her to join G-Unit Records, Inc. in 2005 as the Director of Finance and later, the Director of Finance and Human Resources. During that time Sharon earned her M.A. in Speech Communication and Rhetoric Studies here at Hofstra University. Sharon spent over ten years contributing to the success of both multi-platinum music releases and supporting 50 Cent's entrepreneurship. She helped him to achieve success in the tech, non-profit, entertainment and consumer electronic space. Sharon joined Hofstra's Center for Entrepreneurship in 2015 and has completed the Lean Launchpad Educator's Program and earned a Masters in Business Administration. At Hofstra's Center for Entrepreneurship, Sharon provides students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the community with skills and training necessary to become accomplished entrepreneurs through multiple programs and services. Sharon also advances the mission of the Scott Skodnek Business Development Center by designing and implementing new curriculum for the Empire State Development funded Entrepreneurial Assistance Centers. Sharon was a panelist at the 2020 United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship's 2019 Conference and presented at the Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Center's 2019 Conference. Sharon is currently serving as an E-Advisory Council Member for The National Center for Disability Entrepreneurship (NCDE) at the Viscardi Center.

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SPEAKER & PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES



Jefferson Mao,
*Program Manager
Entrepreneurship Assistance
Centers
Empire State Development*

Jefferson Mao joined Empire State Development in 2019. Prior to this, he spent several years working on various land use and policy issues in New York City government, most recently at the Office of the Manhattan Borough President. He moved to Empire State Development to pursue his passion of helping small businesses, which is informed by his personal experiences growing up in Flushing, Queens. Jefferson graduated from the University of Chicago and obtained a Master's in Urban Planning from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

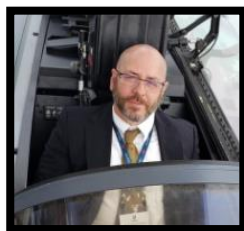


Christine McCann,
*Procurement Specialist
Division of Small Business &
Technology Development
Empire State Development*

Christine McCann began her Economic State Development career over 30 years ago in ESD's Division of Policy and Research in a variety of positions: working with statistics from the Census Bureau, compiling a database of foreign direct investments in New York State and as a business researcher. Currently, she is in Procurement Assistance in the Small Business Division of Empire State Development. Ms. McCann assists both business and government users on the NYS Contract Reporter website. She also directs companies on how to do business with NYS and assists government purchasers with their procurement questions.

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SPEAKER & PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES



Steven Melito
*Senior Solutions Specialist
FuzeHub,
Founder & Co-Owner
Thunderbolt Business Services*

Steve Melito is a Senior Solutions Specialist for FuzeHub, New York's statewide Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NY MEP) Center, and the founder and co-owner of Thunderbolt Business Services, which provides marketing services to manufacturers. Thunderbolt is a certified WBE and specializes in content creation and marketing communications, press releases, trade show support, social media, search engine optimization (SEO), technical writing, and email marketing. Their clients include manufacturers, technology companies, and non-profit organizations.

Steve is a former member of the Sales and Marketing Committee for the International Association of Diecutting and Diemaking (IADD), the current chair of the News & Website Committee for The Los Angeles Rubber Group (TLARGI), and a mentor to student entrepreneurs through Colgate University's Thought into Action (TIA) program



Noelia Ana Moussignac
*Data Dissemination Specialist
Customer Liaison & Marketing
Services Office
Data Dissemination and
Training Branch*

Noelia Moussignac is a Data Dissemination Specialist with the U.S. Census Bureau (2017-present). She is one of several specialists throughout the country that are available to conduct training, give presentations and help with inquiries for several types of stakeholders. She is usually the point of contact for most of NYC, Long Island, as well as Westchester and Rockland Counties. Prior to her work with the Census Bureau, Noelia was a Financial and Program Analyst for the Corps of Engineers from 2013-2017 and as well as for the Department of Defense from 2003-2013.



Ross Takahashi
*Manager of Public Services
New York Public Library
Thomas Yoseloff Business
Center (TYBC)*

Ross Takahashi's public service career at New York Public Library spans more than 30 years. He currently oversees the Thomas Yoseloff Business Center's (TYBC) Information Services and coordinates the Education program, which includes classes on specialized business resources, small business, finance and investments, and industry and technology. He is available for in-depth research consultations as well as class instruction sessions. He received a BA in Psychology from the University of California at Santa Cruz and an MLS from Queens College

2021 Annual Conference and Awards Ceremony

SPEAKER & PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES



Bill Vacca
*Director of Instructional
Technology
Center for Advanced
Technology*

Bill Vacca is also Assistant Principal for Mohonasen Central School District. Both the Center for Advanced Technology, and the entire Mohonasen Central School District was awarded Grow with Google's Partner of the Month for May 2021.

A partner since March 2021, Bill extends the power of education beyond the school walls to advance the digital knowledge of parents and businesses in the local community.

As the head of the technology department for the last two years, one of my main goals was to increase student enrollment. Our entire technology team came together to help create this [Mohonasen Technology Department Promo Video for 2020](#).

In Spring of 2018, Vacca passed the Google for Education L1 & L2 Certified Educator Exams and accepted into their Certified [Trainer](#) and [Innovator](#) cohorts in 2020. Other collaborations and multiple large-scale projects with Google for Education, include the [Junior Training PD Series](#), [Trainer promo video](#), and most recently, the very popular [Google Classroom Video Series](#).



Bette Yee
*Sr. Director
Entrepreneur Development
Empire State Development*

Bette Yee joined the Entrepreneurship Assistance Centers in 2017. Prior to this, she was a senior analyst with the NYS MWBE's Certification Program becoming its director in 2013 where Yee worked in conjunction with Business Development to facilitate minority and women's access to business opportunities in the public or private sectors.

Yee developed her entrepreneurial skills running the operations of a family restaurant well before joining the ranks of community organizations where she chose to follow her interest in gender equality and economic justice as a Director for the Ms. Foundation and volunteer with the Asian Women's Center. Prior to joining the government sector with Empire State Development, she was Director of Client Services & Operations for the Women's Venture Fund, a NYC nonprofit alternative lender.



ESD Application Development

Bin Xie: Associate Director, Application Development

Maya Roskin: Senior Database Administrator

Sergey Druyan: MS Dynamics Application Developer / Analyst

ESD Data Analysis, Management & Reporting

Elizabeth Torres: MS Dynamics Developer / System Administrator

Keith Foster: Data Warehouse Architect / Analyst

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ENTREPRENEUR-of-the-YEAR AWARDEES

EAC: Queens Economic Development Corp (QEDC)

Entrepreneur: Dawn Kelly

Business: The Nourish Spot

Trading an Executive Career to be Her Own Boss



After a highly successful career as a senior communications executive at a major corporation, Dawn Kelly decided it was high time to invest in herself—by opening a new restaurant in her old neighborhood. With her earnings she was able to finance the build-out for The Nourish Spot, attain all the licensing, and formally register her business in March of 2016. By September 2017, the doors to her quick-serve, healthy food and beverage restaurant were opened for business.

The Nourish Spot, in Jamaica, Queens, is the first sustainable health food cafe in South Jamaica. The area had long been a food desert in the heart of a high-poverty and low-income community that has been considered at-risk for generations.

Kelly initially ran all of the restaurant's business operations, but quickly realized that she had a lot to learn—and that she needed help. "I know that as a highly educated and overachieving woman, there are lots of things I just don't know – and one is not having the business acumen to be profitable." While she was able to harness her excellent communications skills in promoting her business, Kelly wasn't fluent in business vernacular—terms such as gross margins, inventory slippage—or familiar with pricing techniques and financial statements. That was when she discovered QEDC's end-of-summer rooftop mixers promoting their next business training class. The Nourish Spot netted its first profit in 2018, and in 2019 Kelly was awarded SBA microbusiness person of the year for New York .

Kelly took on the risk of owning her own business despite discouragement from her own community and family who were concerned that a health food business in an area that only had fast food options would not survive. Kelly persisted with her dream and is proving that her creative leadership and unique idea can make the business a success.

Throughout the pandemic, The Nourish Spot was able to provide community residents with access to organic and non-organic fruits and vegetables in made-to-order smoothies, salads, natural juice blends, sandwich wraps, protein waffles, yogurt parfaits and more to meet dietary or health requirements. The Nourish Spot exists not only to deliver fresh produce and custom food and beverages to the market, but also to create value within their community and for neighborhood stakeholders, including their staff.

Kelly says that QEDC was the very first stop on her journey to profitability and that she still leans on them for mentorship. She is proud of her determination to come back to the neighborhood where she grew up, and where her grandparents established a home nearly 100 years ago. She is grateful to be that beacon of light for the youth in this neighborhood. With The Nourish Spot serving as a host site for the Summer Youth Employment Program, Kelly is able to hire, teach, and mentor young people on the fundamentals of entrepreneurship, integrity, and business ethics.

Kelly embodies the true characteristics of a business leader who has not only sought success for herself but has created a path of success for the community. Two of Kelly's former interns have been hired at The Nourish Spot and another intern has successfully passed the Food Handlers License Test required by NYS law for workers who are in direct or indirect contact with food. Kelly has also become a mentor to countless fledgling young entrepreneurs in the neighboring area, using her own experience as a guide.

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ENTREPRENEUR-of-the-YEAR AWARDEES

EAC: Washington Heights and Inwood Development Corp (WHIDC)

Entrepreneur: Jennyfer Almanzar

Business: ChargePal

Activist-Turned-Unlikely-Entrepreneur Becomes a Role Model for Minority Youth



ChargePal, a rental network for portable chargers, allows users to use its smartphone app to locate nearby charging stations and chargers available for rent. Users can charge their electronic devices on the go and return the charger to any other station. Founder Jennyfer Almanzar set out to solve the out-of-battery mobile phone problem by establishing a charging network across New York City. The app allows users to find the nearest stations, unlock a portable charger and return it to another station—where they pay for the time used. ChargePal batteries are also powered by 100% green energy. To offset the power consumed by the packs, Almanzar buys renewable certificates from generation sites using sun and wind power.

Almanzar is a first-generation college graduate with a double major in Economics and Global Studies and a minor in Capitalism. She was initially drawn to a political career, having grown up in the Washington Heights area where few people of color were in positions of power. That drove her interest and continued involvement in politics and inspired her to work for Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's congressional campaign. Almanzar credits Ocasio-Cortez for encouraging her to start ChargePal. The business idea that would eventually jump-start her journey from politics to the tech world happened during her time abroad where she saw networks of rentable portable chargers that operated like Citi Bikes. Almanzar determined there was a need for a similar network in New York City and that she would make her mark in

tech by creating a company to do so.

Almanzar, who had worked for a software startup in sales after graduating from college, tapped into the Business Mentor New York website for guidance on moving her idea forward. That led her to WHIDC, where she received help to work up a business plan as well as pro bono legal assistance and information on grants and funding resources. Almanzar also received assistance with developing and submitting the LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation, a NYC based nonprofit) grant application. Within a year between the spring of 2019 and the start of 2020, she managed to develop the company, create an app, and felt ready to finally launch ChargePal.

Once the pandemic hit, Almanzar was ready to fully focus on her company. She took out a \$20,000 loan from a commercial bank to obtain 50 portable charging stations from a factory in China and launched in May 2020.

When WHIDC was contacted by an NBC News field producer in February 2021, looking to showcase women entrepreneurs in a segment, Almanzar was eager to participate and help establish a greater audience for her business.

As of summer of 2021, ChargePal has 50 stations (10 chargers per station) and is looking to expand further in NYC.

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ENTREPRENEUR-of-the-YEAR AWARDEES

EAC: Hofstra University

Entrepreneur: Marie Saint-Cyr

Business: Saint-Cyr Art Studio, Inc.

Entrepreneurial Young Artist Discovers Her Niche to Exponential Growth



Marie Saint-Cyr evolved her Wyandach, Long Island business—from hosting painting parties to creating large-scale murals—with purpose. She pivoted her strategy and focused her value proposition on bringing her clients' vision to life, through murals that represent the communities she serves. Growing her business has involved guiding, supporting, and encouraging both the emerging artists that she has hired or subcontracted with and also learning how to rely on established muralists and trusted partners. Through collaboration and sharing her success, Saint-Cyr has created a rising tide that is lifting all boats.

Ever since her family relocated to Long Island from Haiti when she was 8 years old, Saint-Cyr's passion for art persevered, despite her mom's many warnings about the hard life of an artist. As a student at New York City's Fashion Institute of Technology, her vision of being a financially successful artist motivated her to push for approval to take business courses in addition to her art classes. In addition to working many jobs to help pay for college, Saint-Cyr also volunteered at numerous K-12 school art programs to augment her experience. There, she realized how little access those students had to art.

Saint-Cyr launched her business in 2019, billing herself as a “visual arts program designer,” when she discovered that many Long Island municipalities and nonprofits wanted to build their cultural arts programs

however, they had no teams to build them. During the pandemic, she organized young people to paint outdoor signs and murals to help disseminate COVID prevention and safety health messages. To diversify her income stream, Saint-Cyr hosted painting parties for children's parties. Still, by July 2020 she almost quit, worried that she could not sustain this type of business.

After meeting other entrepreneurs in a Zoom session, Saint-Cyr realized she lacked specific goals and action steps for moving forward. She turned to mentorship offered through Hofstra's Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship's Entrepreneurs-in-Residence. The program's digital marketing workshops gave her the hands-on skills to implement and develop marketing strategies for Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and SEO (search engine optimization) to generate leads and increase revenue. Thanks to Hofstra's Entrepreneurship Assistance Center, she was also able to get MWBE-certified. That led to many substantial city and state contracts, including those from NYC's Department of Education's Summer Rising program, sponsored by the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, City Cultural Aid, the NYC Department of Education, NYC Department of Transportation, and the New York State Assembly.

Saint-Cyr also participated in Ascend Long Island, a 10-week program designed to help diverse entrepreneurs develop the capacity to win contracts from larger companies, such as Mastercard, and a grant from the Mellon Foundation initiative to give artists a living wage. This allowed her to scale and rapidly grow her business, from \$49,000 in 2019 to more than triple that in the first eight months of 2021.

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ENTREPRENEUR-of-the-YEAR AWARDEES

EAC: Binghamton Local Development Corporation (BLDC)

Entrepreneur: Ewelina Zajac-Holdrege

Business: Idea Kraft

Established Marketing Firm Shares Success Tips and Thrives through the Pandemic



Idea Kraft is a Binghamton, NY branding and creative design agency specializing in brand strategy and business development. The agency builds brands, designs websites, and creates product packaging that stands out in the marketplace. From regional brands to global companies, Idea Kraft helps businesses grow and succeed through beautiful and innovative design. Clients include Binghamton University, Syracuse University and SUNY Cortland, as well as the Broome County Health Department, the Alliance for Manufacturing and Technology and Amphenol. During the pandemic, Ewelina Zajac-Holdrege shared her success and concentrated on collaboration, posting free trainings and tips on her website for those struggling to keep their businesses alive.

Zajac-Holdrege built her award-winning company from humble beginnings. In 2004, she left Poland for the Binghamton area with only a backpack full of clothes and a couple hundred dollars in her pocket. Her graphic design education landed her jobs in the corporate world, where she further sharpened her skills and reputation and took on side gigs. By early 2013, her side jobs turned into full-time self-employment, enough to officially start a freelance graphic design business. That business initially operated out of her basement but moved later that same year to its current location at the historic Lackawanna Train Station in downtown Binghamton.

The business kept her busy, but Zajac-Holdrege knew she needed larger accounts and to diversify her income stream. She tried in 2014 but lost her first bid for a government contract. Zajac-Holdrege realized that her business did not have the capacity to compete with bigger firms, and that without any government contracting experience, she needed to start with smaller contracting jobs. She forged on and discovered another pathway via the EAC program at BLDC, which helped her understand the benefits of being certified as a woman-owned business.

By 2015, Idea Kraft was certified as a NYS WBE and encouraged to enter the EAC's business plan competition. She enrolled in the business plan training class and was one of the top winners. Idea Kraft has been growing double digits every year since then.

By 2016 Idea Kraft had been growing its revenues by 50% each year. Not only has Idea Kraft weathered the Covid-19 pandemic, it is now on track to report 2021 as the most successful year yet. Idea Kraft has grown to become a world-class creative and web business, working with many nonprofit organizations, Fortune 500 companies and higher education institutions. Zajac-Holdrege has created several high-pay, full-time jobs, promoted numerous freelance jobs in the Southern Tier and has spent more than \$1 million supporting local vendors and organizations. She has been given many prestigious industry awards and has served on many nonprofit boards in the Southern Tier, including the Southern Tier Communications Association, eatBING and Parents and Teachers for Students Organization at Palmer Elementary in Windsor, just to name a few. Zajac-Holdrege continues to be a great ambassador for small businesses and the local community and volunteers her time serving as a judge and mentor during the Greater Binghamton Scholastic Challenge Competition for high school students in grades 9 through 12 to develop ideas and businesses that directly impact the community.

One of Zajac-Holdrege's greatest lessons has been to stop micromanaging, allowing her to work on building her business instead of in her business; or as she puts it; learning how to maintain quality control with quality time versus quantity of time. Zajac-Holdrege's foresight has ensured that Idea Kraft will thrive in a global market, while still maintaining strong roots in Binghamton.

2021 Annual Conference and Awards Ceremony

ENTREPRENEUR-of-the-YEAR AWARDEES

EAC: Suffolk County Community College (SCCC)

Entrepreneur: Patricia Ejikeme

Business: Patifco Corporation, Inc.

Top-Notch Consulting Firm Finds Opportunity Amid Pandemic Crises



Patricia Ejikeme, PMP, is the founder and Executive Director of Patifco Corporation, a Long Island-based MWBE that provides a wide range of strategic consulting and managed services to commercial, nonprofit and government organizations. In addition to her strong background in technology and finance, Ejikeme has demonstrated great resourcefulness and flexibility in identifying business needs and pivoting towards new opportunities.

Ejikeme, who founded her business in 2016, recognized the potential in providing commercial paper products to government agencies, even though she was new to the field. She designed and trademarked her products, worked with manufacturers, and followed through with the procurement process. Ejikeme has since successfully secured multimillion-dollar contracts for her commercial paper products with the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services and the New York City Housing Authority.

Ejikeme was tenacious in her mission to grow her business, overcoming each challenge that came with entering this new field of government contracting—including securing financing to fund the first shipment of her products from the manufacturer. Despite having already won a three-year, \$193,000 contract, and despite her extensive experience in project management, Ejikeme could not obtain the initial \$25,000 loan she needed. With no prior history of contracting, the lenders she approached would not lend her the funds due to her lack of business activity. That's when Ejikeme reached out to Daphne Gordon at the Suffolk County Community College (SCCC) Entrepreneurship Assistance Center. Gordon worked together with Ejikeme to contact multiple lenders until they were finally able to obtain the much-needed line of credit from La Fuerza Unida, a CDFI microlender and one of SCCC's partners.

Since securing that initial funding, Patifco Corporation has successfully contracted with additional government agencies and grown new revenues by 300% from 2019 to 2020. They now employ 31 part-time staff and operate out of warehouses in Brooklyn and Long Island.

2021 Annual Conference and Awards Ceremony

ENTREPRENEUR-of-the-YEAR AWARDEES

EAC: Business Outreach Center Network (BOCNet)

Entrepreneur: Steven Cruz

Business: Omega Educational Consulting, Inc.

Consulting Firm Survives the Odds By Pivoting Focus from Global to Local



Steven Cruz is the founder and CEO of Omega Educational Consulting, an independent educational consulting service in New York City that has been assisting domestic and international students with the U.S. college admissions process since 2008. A 31-year veteran of the industry, Cruz demonstrated resiliency and adaptiveness in navigating his company through the business challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, pivoting his efforts, diversifying his offerings, and creating a new line of services in response to the many ways in which his industry has been impacted.

Omega Educational Consulting's business, including a significant international client base, was hard hit by the pandemic and the tremendous uncertainty it caused in the field of higher education and college admissions. The imposition of travel bans and the restrictions on in-person learning threw everything into disarray and Cruz did everything he could to keep his company afloat. Despite the hit to his bottom line, Cruz took on significant pro bono work in order to keep his team working and compensated. Cruz also developed a multi-part college admissions course for hundreds of students and parents at the local high schools currently in the New York City school system that he hopes to offer nationally, covering everything from financial aid to personal statements supporting college entrance applications; he plans to roll out the course to more schools in the coming year.

Throughout the pandemic year, the Business Outreach Center Network (BOCNet) Entrepreneurship Assistance Center played an integral role in assisting Cruz, including helping him with two rounds of PPP applications and working hand-in-hand with him to value his business and expand his offerings. While information about COVID-related assistance is publicly available, what Cruz especially appreciated from BOC was their personalized attention and guidance. "It was like they opened up a new world that I didn't know existed, about PPP, and all these programs and systems," says Cruz. "I want to provide the same kind of service to my clients that BOC did for me."