



For Immediate Release

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Career Tech Engineering Academy Wins with Polished Robotics Pitch

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. – It was a well-polished pitch featuring a robotic greenhouse that won the honors and cash prize for Engineering Academy students at the Northern Michigan Startup Week [Student Pitch Competition](#) on Friday, May 13. The team of five [Career Tech Engineering Academy](#) students let their STEM and presentation skills shine for a judging panel of local entrepreneurs.

The Engineering Academy students below presented a concept for an irrigation system that supports sustainable agricultural growth in regions that suffer food and water insecurity:

- Timothy Blausey (Benzie Central High School)
- Samuel Fikes (Traverse City West Senior High)
- Jeremiah Forro (Kingsley High School)
- Lily Kolbusz (Kingsley High School)
- Mackenzie Womack (Traverse City West Senior High)

The students pitched a workcell robot they developed and named “The Greenhouse Effect,” which received a Silver Award and a Honda Innovation Award at the [March 2022 National Robotics Challenge](#). The automated greenhouse concept uses engineering skills in mechanics, electrical and computer science to maintain and harvest crops. Armed with persuasive supporting data, engineering problem-solving and a prototype, the team won over judges as they went up against competitors from Elk Rapids High School, Traverse City Central High School and Traverse City West Senior High.

“I’m proud of how all of our Engineering Academy students embrace academic and creative capabilities and turn them into viable concepts,” said Engineering Academy instructor Hollianne McHugh. “This event was an excellent opportunity for these talented kids to experience the rigors of starting a business that can actually survive, thrive and make a difference in the world.”

The May 13 pitch night at the Traverse City Opera House was part of a series of Northern Michigan Startup Week events that showcased innovation and provided fuel to startup projects. The Student Pitch Competition was created to help budding innovators and entrepreneurs develop creativity and collaboration skills, strengthen problem-solving and network with entrepreneurs and startups. All of the

competing students were mentored by their schools' instructors, SCORE Traverse City and Michigan Technological University staff.

The Student Pitch Competition was hosted by Newton's Road, Northern Michigan College (NMC), and the NMC Foundation. For more information on Northern Michigan Startup Week, visit its [website](#).

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North Ed Career Tech offers [21 programs](#) to high school juniors and seniors from Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska and Leelanau counties. Students are educated in career and technical fields offering hands-on practical experiences, job shadowing, career exploration and early college opportunities, along with rigorous academic integration. For more information about North Ed Career Tech, [click here](#).





Photos above: Engineering Academy students from Northwest Education Services Career Tech won the Northern Michigan Startup Week Student Pitch Competition at the Traverse City Opera House on Friday, May 13. Students, from left are Jeremiah Forro, Timothy Blausey, Samuel Fikes, Lily Kolbusz and Mackenzie Womack (Photo courtesy of Newton's Road)