Celebrating Startups with UNH Roots for National Entrepreneurship Week

University centers play key role in kickstarting businesses

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In recognition of National Entrepreneurship Week (Feb. 11-17), the University of New Hampshire is celebrating the innovative startups driving the state and country’s economy – paying special tribute to those who began their journey on campus with support from the Peter T. Paul Entrepreneurship Center (https://www.unh.edu/ecenter/) (EC) and New Hampshire Small Business Development Center (https://www.nhsbdc.org/) (NHSBDC).

“Entrepreneurship, at its core, is problem-solving,” says Joshua Cyr, interim director of the UNH Entrepreneurship Center. “In my role, I work with students from across the university who are motivated to solve a problem with a spark of an idea. The great thing about the Entrepreneurship Center is that no matter where someone might be in the development of their idea, we have the resources to meet them right where they are and help them advance from concept to commercialization.”

Just ask Galen Hand ’16, founder of NOCA Beverages (https://drinknoca.com/), a New England-based beverage company. His ties to the university made it easy for him to return to campus in 2019 for help from Cheryl Parker, brewery manager and professor in agriculture, nutrition and food systems. Parker supported Hand by inviting him to participate in engaging and informative discussions with business leaders focusing on the challenges and opportunities for startups. These conversations, along with resources available through the EC and NHSBDC, have helped NOCA Beverages expand its sales footprint from regional to national.
“The University of New Hampshire has played a huge role in the development and growth of NOCA Beverages,” Hand says. “We (Galen and his fellow co-founders) knew what we wanted to do but would not have been able to get there without the support of Parker’s guidance or the generous donors from my network of UNH alumni. I would encourage anyone thinking about starting a business to check the resources available at the university – it will save you a lot of time and frustration.”

NOCA Beverages is currently sold in 25 states, including New Hampshire. Locals can shop the brand at Market Basket (https://www.shopmarketbasket.com/).

Connor Roelke ’15 tells a similar story, as he too established his company, Nobl Beverages (https://noblbeverages.com/), on campus. He intentionally took a semester off from his business administration/marketing major to register for the 2015 Paul J. Holloway Prize Competition (https://paulcollege.unh.edu/holloway). In the months of the competition, in which judges test and review work, his nitro cold brew coffee maker was born. Though he came in third place in the competition, his company has thrived in the years since, and his coffee is now served in more than 600 retail locations across New England, including cafes, restaurants and workplaces. Nobl offers its coffee on draft and in cans and has expanded to other beverages outside of coffee, as well.

“When I initially entered this idea of a coffee production and distribution company to Holloway, I wasn’t really expecting to do anything with it. But the feedback was so good that I decided, you know what, let’s at least try,” Roelke says. “I think being an entrepreneur is having that crazy drive to do something, and then from there it’s just falling off a cliff and hopefully sticking the landing.”

But entrepreneurship does not stop with students. As a part of the university’s core, it extends to faculty. UNH Extension’s (https://extension.unh.edu/) Malin Clyde, community volunteer state specialist, and Haley Andreozzi, wildlife conservation state specialist, became the 2021 Innovators of the Year as the driving force behind Nature Groupie (https://naturegroupie.org/), one of several successful mission-driven not-for-profit UNH spinouts.

Nature Groupie, which began in 2013 as a collaboration between UNH Extension and The Stewardship Network in the Great Lakes region, links outdoor enthusiasts with volunteer opportunities at places they love by sharing events that help forests, coastal ecosystems, communities and wildlife. Since that time, more than 5,000 volunteers have connected with 200-plus environmental groups through the company’s website to clean rivers, restore wildlife habitats, maintain trails, plant trees and do environmental research in New England.

The New Hampshire Small Business Development Center, a leading resource for business advising and education for small businesses in the Granite State, plays a vital role in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

“Entrepreneurship allows people to achieve their dreams,” says Liz Gray, NHSBDC state director. “In my role I get to be an advisor as individuals start and grow their businesses, develop wealth for their families and make their communities more vibrant. It’s the small businesses that make a difference, creating jobs and drawing people to downtown areas.”

To learn more about entrepreneurship at UNH, please visit our EC or NHSBDC in person or online.