



**Husky  
Innovate**

Pavlis Honors College • Innovation & Commercialization • College of Business

# HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

2022|2023

# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

This year was a game changer for our student entrepreneurs. Students demonstrated commitment to their innovations by working tirelessly to hone their pitches. All told, Husky Innovate students won \$67K in business pitch prize money! Students like Rourke Sylvain & Ali Dabas with imi (Integrated Molecular Innovations), Bayle Golden with Stempower, and Jordan Craven with Sizelogic (formerly Tall and Small Designs) made great strides advancing their business concepts. We hosted a line-up of fabulous guest speakers throughout the year and during Innovation Week. (For more details, see Impact at a Glance.)



**Lisa Casper**

Husky Innovate expanded its programming by adding new workshops, mentoring opportunities, and pitch competitions. Innovation Week, a weeklong celebration of Innovation during January, included eight outstanding events! The popular student pitch event, the Bob Mark Business Model Pitch Competition was a draw for students, alumni from afar, faculty, staff and community. As usual, parents and friends were able to join through an online option.

In the Alley Makerspace student intern-managers led making activities, oversaw volunteer coach training and scheduling, and facilitated making events during each semester. The Alley Makerspace saw an uptick in users with over 4,000 makers using the space. Makerspace leaders served the local community by hosting making activities at the local inaugural Maker Fest Event hosted by Superior Fab Labs.

The Husky Innovate team celebrated Startup Week with the energizing I&E (innovation and entrepreneurship) community in Traverse City. Student Jordan Craven impressed judges and audience members when she pitched at TCNewTech and won first prize and audience favorite.

We could not provide all of these great opportunities without help. A special thank you to all of our alums, faculty, staff, and I&E community for generously contributing your time and talent to our students by giving talks, mentoring students, hosting "Office Hours," presenting panel discussions, acting as judges at our pitch competitions, and more! You all represent the larger Husky Innovate team and contributed to another great year, thank you.

Husky Innovate is a network of I&E contributors. Each year we strive to grow our I&E (innovation and entrepreneurship) ecosystem to support our students and provide startups the opportunity to grow. We look forward to another great year of student and Tech community engagement! I hope we see you at one of our pitch competitions, for Innovation Week, or during one of our Husky Innovate Bridge talks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Casper". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lisa Casper

# ABOUT



**Husky  
Innovate**  
Pavlis Honors College • Innovation & Commercialization • College of Business

As Michigan Tech's Innovation and Entrepreneurship resource center, Husky Innovate connects student innovators and faculty and staff researchers with the support and resources needed to advance their ideas through the I&E process, by providing co-curricular educational and experiential learning programs, mentorship, and funding opportunities.

Husky Innovate is a collaboration with the Pavlis Honors College (PHC), the Office of Innovation and Commercialization (OIC), and the College of Business (COB). Our interdisciplinary team allows us to provide an agile and comprehensive set of resources to student innovators.

Husky Innovate resources include:

- Pitch competitions
- Workshops
- Guest talks
- Internships
- Off-site opportunities
- The Alley Makerspace
- University Innovation Fellows
- ICorps Site Program
- Paths to commercialization

## Our Vision

To support a university campus where entrepreneurial spirit thrives throughout the community and across disciplines, converting ideas into capital and impact.

## Our Mission

To enhance the potential of the campus community to develop and implement innovations and ideas and to launch inventions by building and managing a cohesive set of entrepreneurial innovation resources that enable success



## MEET THE HUSKY INNOVATE TEAM



**Lisa Casper**  
Husky Innovate Director,  
Pavlis Honors College



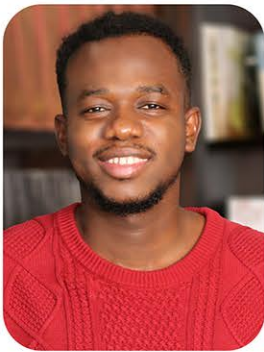
**Mary Raber**  
Executive Council Advisor,  
College of Engineering



**Jim Baker**  
Executive Council Advisor,  
Office of Innovation and  
Commercialization



**Jon Leinonen**  
Executive Council Advisor,  
College of Business



**Eugene Brown Agyei**  
Graduate Student  
Marketing Intern



**Meg Rotole**  
Makerspace Student  
Manager Intern



**Jack Philp**  
Makerspace Student  
Manager Intern

## MEET OUR INTERNAL ADVISORY BOARD (IAB)



**Charles Wallace**  
Associate Professor,  
College of Computing



**Erich Petushek**  
Assistant Professor,  
Cognitive and Learning  
Sciences



**Nathan Manser**  
Professor of Practice,  
Geological and Mining  
Engineering and Sciences



**Timothy Eisele**  
Associate Professor,  
Chemical Engineering



**Josue Reynoso**  
Assistant Professor,  
College of Business



**Len Switzer**  
Associate Director,  
Enterprise



**William Endres**  
Associate Professor,  
Mechanical Engineering,  
Engineering Mechanics



# impact at a glance

As Michigan Tech's Innovation and Entrepreneurship resource center, Husky Innovate connects student innovators and faculty and staff researchers with the support and resources needed to advance their ideas through the I&E process, by providing co-curricular educational and experiential learning programs, mentorship, and funding opportunities.

**\$67K in prize money was awarded to our students this year!**

## Innovation Week

Each year we host a weeklong celebration of innovation. Innovation Week was started by University Innovation Fellows students, and we've carried tradition forward. The Bob Mark Business Model Pitch Competition pulled the community together as students' showcases their innovations. Many of our events were in person, but some were online allowing us to reach a broader audience.

Talks included:

Keynote speaker Charles Nwatu with Netflix who presented "Leading Innovation." Charles shared how embracing diverse perspectives has contributed to his mindset as an intrapreneur. He shared how he has led change throughout an impressive career with leadership roles at LinkedIn, Twilio, and StitchFix.

Eric Robert, MTU alum and Executive Director of 20Fathoms, the Traverse City Incubator presented "New Venture Creation" sharing insights from his experience as former Executive Director for a Silicon Valley business consulting company. He talked about external influences on the I&E ecosystem and provided career & startup success tips for innovators of all types.

"Reverse Pitch Presentations with Nate Yenor," Director of Technology Business Incubation with the Office of Innovation and Commercialization. Nate presented Tech's latest translational research technology innovations and available team positions that need to be filled in order to form a startup.

"Finance Your Venture Panel Discussion"- John Rockewell, CEO and President of Acelergy Corporation and Jeff Helminski, Co-Founder and Managing Partner of Auxo Investment Partners. Both alums, who co-presented this panel discussion about how investment decisions to finance new ventures are made, are successful venture capitalists with insight into venture financing.



The poster for Innovation Week 2023 features a dark blue background with a light blue gear icon on the left. At the top, the Husky Innovate logo is displayed next to the text "INNOVATION WEEK 2023". The schedule is as follows:

- TUESDAY, JANUARY 17**  
LEADING INNOVATION  
Featuring Charles Nwatu  
4:00-5:00 PM, Zoom
- WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18**  
NEW VENTURE CREATION  
Featuring Eric Roberts  
12:00-1:00 PM, MUB Ballroom A
- THURSDAY, JANUARY 19**  
REVERSE PITCH PRESENTATION  
Featuring Nate Yenor  
12:00-1:00 PM, Zoom
- BOB MARK BUSINESS MODEL PITCH COMPETITION**  
5:00-7:30 PM, MUB Ballroom A
- FRIDAY, JANUARY 20**  
FINANCING YOUR VENTURE  
Panel Discussion  
12:00-1:00 PM, Zoom

At the bottom, the Michigan Technological University logo is on the left, and the website [www.mtu.edu/husky-innovate](http://www.mtu.edu/husky-innovate) is on the right. A small disclaimer at the very bottom reads: "Michigan Tech is an Equal Opportunity Educational Institution/Equal Opportunity Employer. We provide equal opportunity for all, including protected veterans and individuals with disabilities."



## Idea Pitch Awards

Students with an innovative idea that could disrupt the status quo and "business as usual" are welcome to pitch their ideas at the Idea Pitch Competition. Graduate and undergraduate students from all disciplines are invited. This October, the following contestants won:

- First Prize — Anastasia Motta with The Droplet (\$200)
- Second Prize — Cassandra Nash with College Friendly Cabinets (\$100)
- Third Prize — Alex Bos with The SELF Couch (\$50)
- Honorable Mention — Ruby Alhajar with Monitoring System for Microbial Influence (\$25)
- Audience Favorite— Noel Kamdem-Tegue with Black Earth Rising, a food truck (\$25)
- Social Impact Award presented by Elham Asgari (CoB) — Chethan Magnan with School
- Swap (\$100)



## Michigan Collegiate Startup Challenge (MCSC)

Four Huskies representing three teams pitched their business ideas at Michigan State University during the Michigan Collegiate Startup Challenge (MCSC). MCSC is Michigan's university-level business model competition specifically designed for student entrepreneurs across Michigan. MCSC is hosted by Michigan State and sponsored by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. This event fosters entrepreneurship by encouraging students to commercialize their ideas. 20 college students representing nine schools from across Michigan pitched their ideas.

Michigan Tech teams included:

- Jordan Craven, Tall and Small Designs,
- Anastasia (Asia) Motta and Zane Smalley, The Droplet
- Rourke Sylvain with imi (Integrated Molecular Innovations)

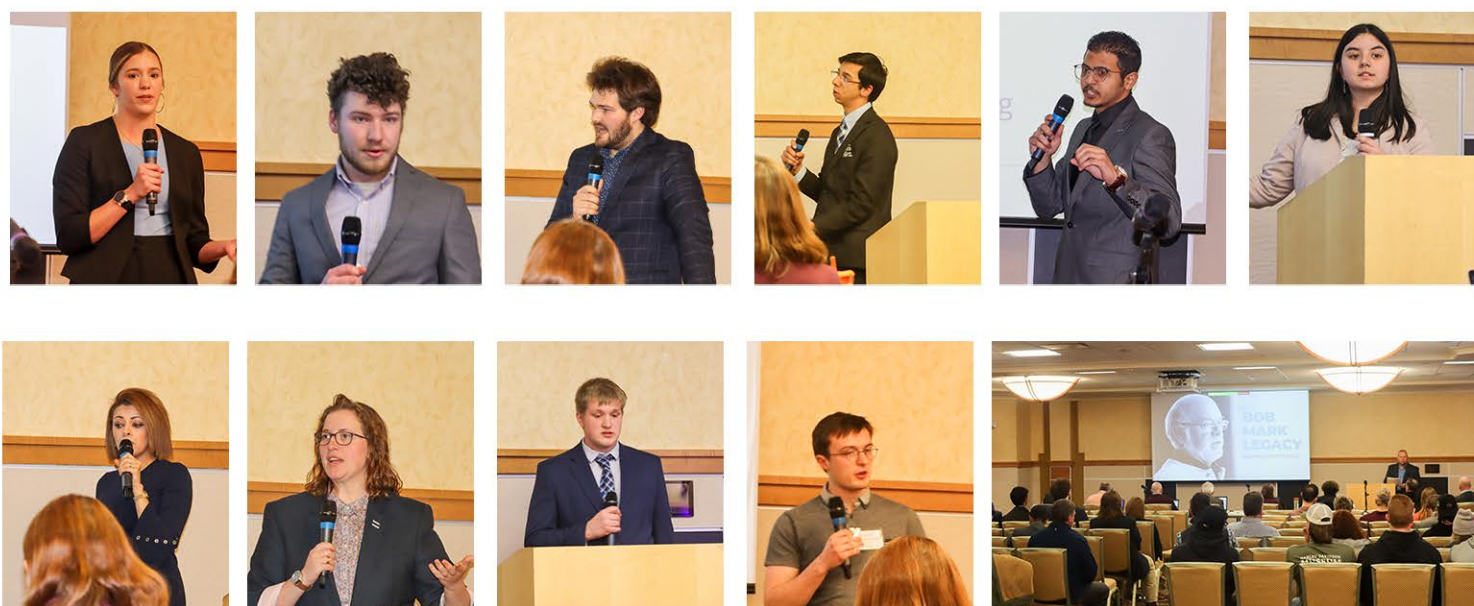
Congratulations to Jordan Craven and Rourke Sylvain: Craven took first place, winning \$5,000, and Sylvain took fourth place, winning \$1,000.



## Bob Mark Business Model Pitch Competition

A highlight of Tech's Innovation Week, this legacy event celebrates entrepreneurship and is a tribute to the late College of Business (COB) Professor of Practice Bob Mark. There were three categories of prizes: business model, social impact, and breakout innovation. The business model category looked at how well the solution addresses the customers' needs, the path to revenue, and the overall presentation. The social impact category examined the significance of the social problem and how well the solution addressed it. The breakout innovation award considered the solution's novelty, ease of implementation, and time to implementation. The following contestants won:

- First Prize — Bayle Golden with SafeROW (\$2,000)
- Second Prize — Jordan Craven with Tall and Small Designs (\$1,000)
- Third Prize — Asia Motta with The Droplet (\$500)
- Honorable Mention — Rehab (Ruby) Alhajjar with The Water Solution (\$250)
- Audience Favorite — Jordan Craven with Tall and Small Designs (\$250)
- Social Impact Award - Bayle Golden with SafeROW (\$1,000)
- Breakout Innovation Award - Jordan Craven with Tall and Small Designs (\$1,000)





## New Venture Challenge at Central Michigan University

For more than a decade, Michigan Technological University and Central Michigan University have collaborated to offer Tech students the opportunity to compete at the New Venture Competition in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. Students compete for more than \$100,000 in cash prizes and in-kind services. Tech students won the following awards in the Seven-Minute Pitch Competition category:

- Social Mission Category - First Prize - Bayle Golden with STEMPOWER (\$10,000)
- Best Overall Pitch - Bayle Golden with STEMPOWER (\$10,000)
- Tech High Growth category - Third Prize - Rourke Sylvain with imi (\$2,000)



## TCNewTech



Undergraduate student Jordan Craven (management information systems and computer science) pitched Sizelogic at the TCNewTech University Pitch Showdown and won both First Prize at \$1,500 and Audience Favorite at \$500. Sizelogic is an innovative online clothing solution to ensure that clothes purchased online fit. Craven competed against students from colleges across Michigan. The TCNewTech pitch event is part of Northern Michigan Startup Week, a weeklong celebration of entrepreneurship held in Traverse City each year.

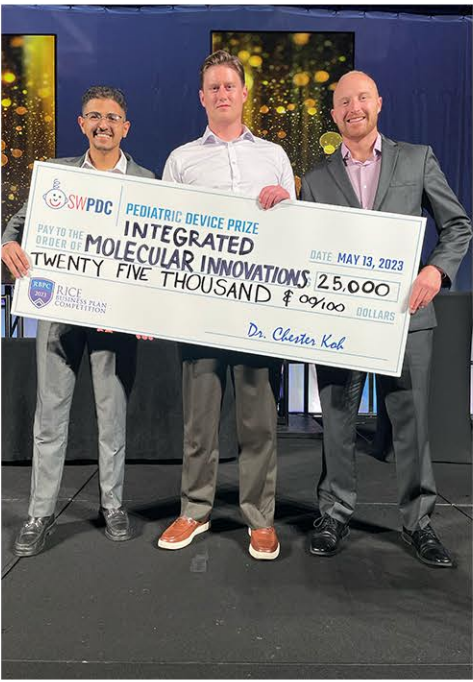






# Rice Business Plan Competition

Graduate student Rourke Sylvain (biomedical engineering) and Ali Dabas '23 (B.S. Biomedical Engineering) pitched imi (integrated molecular innovations) at the renowned Rice Business Plan Competition. They won \$25,000 in prize money for the best pediatric device, sponsored by Southwest National Pediatric Device Innovation Consortium (SWPDC). Sylvain, founder and CEO, and Ali Dabas, co-founder and Chief Technical Officer, pitched a wearable device that revolutionizes health care by eliminating the need for centralized clinical testing. They pitched in two categories. The shorter elevator pitch can be viewed on YouTube.



# University Innovation Fellows

The University Innovation Fellows is an international program offered through the Stanford University Hasso Plattner Institute of Design (d.school). Students identified an opportunity on campus and framed a solution as part of a year-long project. Teams came up with complementary solutions to an existing problem that students face, finding student resources on campus. They developed two prototypes, revamping an existing app and a student guide. Meg Rotole and Suhayb Zeqlam attended the transformative Silicon Valley Meetup held each March. The Meetup is an experiential conference in which fellows collaborate with other UIFs from around the world by applying design thinking tools and strategies. In the spring semester of 2022, the Pavlis Honors College hosted a pinning ceremony for students who completed the UIF program. Four students finished this year's cohort: Meg Rotole (mechanical engineering), Suhayb Zeqlam (electrical engineering), Kyler Bomhof (computer science), and Bayle Golden (graduate student Engineering Management).



## I-Corps

An affiliate member of the NSF I-Corps Great Lakes Region Hub, Michigan Tech and hosted two cohorts during the academic year. At the completion of 30 customer discovery interviews, eligible teams may be awarded a \$1,000 mini-grant and continue on to the I-Corps National Program. Thirty one individuals completed the I-Corps program. Two applied research faculty teams will go on to the I-Corps National Program in which they have \$50K available towards customer discovery interviews. The I-Corps program uses the lean startup methodology to de-risk technology by conducting customer discovery interviews in order to validate or invalidate their business model hypotheses and to find a scalable business model. Forty-three individuals completed our lean startup workshops. Throughout the program, they worked to validate their business hypotheses through customer discovery interviews and developed scalable business models.

## Student Testimonials

Husky innovate creates a supportive ecosystem for entrepreneurs. I recommend every student who has an idea to participate in husky innovates events and leverage their support. The events and programs I participated in greatly enhanced my understanding of the significance of people-first design and the importance of distinguishing the solution from the problem. Typically, I tend to approach problem-solving with a preconceived solution in mind. However, through my involvement in the UIF program and other events, I have

**Ali Dabas**

The events and programs I participated in greatly enhanced my understanding of the significance of people-first design and the importance of distinguishing the solution from the problem. Typically, I tend to approach problem-solving with a preconceived solution in mind. However, through my involvement in the UIF program and other events, I have significantly improved my ability to generate ideas before creating prototypes and implementing solutions.

**Kyler Bomhof**

Without the insights, help, and support offered to me by Husky Innovate and the MTEC smart Zone the seed that was my business idea would not have germinated. Their support in the beginning was instrumental to the successes imi now experiences.

**Rourke Sylvain**



# Workshops & Talks

In addition to our regularly scheduled events, we added new venues.

- Professor Jon Leinonen, College of Business, hosted “Explaining Your Market Opportunity,” a workshop which proved helpful for students working to characterize the size of their market, a compelling part of any business model pitch.
- Dr. Wayne Gersie, Vice President for Diversity & Inclusion, presented “How Diversity Supports Innovation” which demonstrated that listening to stakeholders leads to insightful and value-added solutions.
- Office Hours with mentor Joe Corso ‘77 (B.S. Electrical Engineering) proved invaluable to innovators honing their pitches and business models.
- Husky Innovate facilitated student engagement with two new pitch competitions; MCSC (Michigan Collegiate Startup Challenge), and the prestigious Rice Business Plan Competition with Tech winners at both.
- During the fall semester, Ed Kim, Program Director, MTRAC Innovation Hub for Advanced Computing Technologies, Ed is a deep tech translational research mentor and investor. He presented “New Venture Creation,” and shared his insights on commercializing innovations and lessons learned as an entrepreneur and investor.
- During the spring semester, we pulled in esteemed entrepreneurs and philanthropic leaders Rebecca Ufkes, Phil Ufkes, Thu Brule, and David Brule for a panel discussion. Collectively, their experiences were informed by leading ventures housed right here in the UP, across the nation, and in fields including technology, manufacturing, and the beauty industry. Each shared their rich experiences, knowledge and insights about how to

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## SPRING 2023 | EVENTS CALENDAR

**LEADING INNOVATION WITH CHARLES NWATU**  
Tuesday, January 17, 4-5 pm  
Virtual

**NEW VENTURE CREATION WITH ERIC ROBERTS**  
Wednesday, January 18, 12-1 pm  
MUB Ballroom A

**REVERSE PITCH PRESENTATION WITH NATE YENOR**  
Thursday, January 19, 12-1 pm  
Virtual

**BOB MARK BUSINESS MODEL PITCH COMPETITION**  
Thursday, January 19, 5-7:30 pm  
MUB Ballroom A

**FINANCING YOUR VENTURE**  
Friday, January 20, 12-1 pm  
Virtual

**FINANCE YOUR INNOVATION WITH PATRICK VISSER**  
Wednesday, February 15, 4-5 pm  
Virtual

**TELLING YOUR STORY**  
Thursday, February 23, 4-5:30 pm  
Pavlis Honors College, M6M 722

**NEW VENTURE INFO SESSION**  
Wednesday, March 1, 5-6 pm  
Zoom

**NEW VENTURE PREP SESSION 1**  
Wednesday, March 15, 4-5:30 pm  
Pavlis Honors College, M6M 722

**SESSION 2**  
Thursday, March 23, 4-5:30 pm  
Pavlis Honors College, M6M 722

**NEW VENTURE CHALLENGE**  
Preliminary Round - Tuesday, April 11  
Final Pitch - Friday, April 21, Central Michigan University

Learn more and register by visiting [mtu.edu/husky-innovate](https://mtu.edu/husky-innovate). Keep an eye out for additional innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities!

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## FALL 2022 | EVENTS CALENDAR

**INTRODUCTION TO DESIGN THINKING**  
Wednesday, September 7, 4-6 pm  
The Alley Makerspace

**INTRODUCTION TO DESIGN THINKING**  
Tuesday, September 13, 4-6 pm  
The Alley Makerspace

**HOW DIVERSITY SUPPORTS INNOVATION WITH DR. WAYNE GERSIE**  
Thursday, September 15, 4-5 pm  
Fisher 325

**NEW VENTURE CREATION WITH INNOVATOR EDWARD KIM**  
Wednesday, September 28, 4-5 pm  
Virtual

**IDEA PITCH COMPETITION**  
Tuesday, October 4, 4-6 pm  
GLRC 202

**PROTOTYPE YOUR INNOVATION**  
Wednesday, October 26, 4-6 pm  
Alley Makerspace

**PROTECT YOUR INNOVATION**  
Wednesday, November 2, 4-6 pm  
Library 244

**WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP DAY PANEL DISCUSSION**  
Thursday, November 10, 4-5:30 pm  
Fisher 325

**BUSINESS MODEL BOOTCAMP WITH JON AND LISA**  
Monday, November 14, 4-6 pm  
Virtual

**EXPLAINING YOUR MARKET OPPORTUNITY**  
Thursday, December 1, 4-5:30 pm  
Fisher 325

Learn more and register by visiting [mtu.edu/husky-innovate](https://mtu.edu/husky-innovate). Keep an eye out for additional innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities!

I have benefitted tremendously from being a part of Husky Innovate and I hope to continue being involved in the future. My abilities to speak in front of crowds, and do so effectively, would not be half of what it is without this program.

**Chethan Magnan**

The Bob Mark competition provided genuinely valuable feedback from a host of experienced business owners on the shortcoming and strengths of the product idea I was presenting!

**Samuel Vellequette**





## The Alley Makerspace

The Alley Makerspace is a creative space on campus with open source equipment and tools available to all students. Equipment includes 3D printers, woodworking equipment, electronics, and sewing available during the spring and fall semesters. Daily operations are managed by student interns who coordinate a team of trained student volunteer coaches. Throughout the year, students host making and training events, making this space a popular destination for building prototypes for a class project or just for fun. This year we had over 4,000 check-ins. Since 2016 we have seen over 24K check-ins!

The Makers Guild, a student organization of makers, contributed to the space by hosting and sponsoring make nights and making oriented events. Including Makers Guild, four student organizations meet regularly at the Alley Makerspace; Craft Club, Halo (Husky Amateur Lego Organization), and Rocket League.

Alley Makerspace makers demonstrated their leadership when they took their making and coaching skills on the road during the community Maker Fest hosted by Superior Fab Labs at Houghton High School. Meg Rotole, Jack Philp, and Eric Nordan and other Tech students led making activities with makers of all ages at the Maker Fest Event.

Milwaukee Tool generously donated hand-tools and consumables to the Alley. Students were thrilled to receive the donation from our friends at Milwaukee Tool.



# Sponsorship & Gifts



Michigan Technological University  
College of Business



**MICHIGAN ECONOMIC**  
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



Creative Mines



## Special thanks to this year's generous sponsors and supporters:

- Pavlis Honors College
- Office of Innovation and Commercialization
- College of Business
- Rick and Jo Berquist
- Dan (Michigan Tech alum) and Jane Green
- College of Business Gates Professor Elham Asgari
- Patrick Visser, MTEC SmartZone and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation
- Jim Baker (Associate Vice President for Research Administration) and Victoria Baker
- Magann Dykema (Michigan Tech alum)
- Leanne (Michigan Tech alum) and Steven Jensen
- Corporate sponsor, Milwaukee Tool