

Home > Local News > Business

Pitching for a win; Front Royal businessman wins Entrepreneur Café grand prize

Laura Gomez took home the "people's choice" prize

By Nathan Budryk

12:38 pm Friday, April 22, 2016



Bill Long, owner of Bill Long's Auto Care Clinic, stands along this slab structure that will part of his addition to his auto repair business off Winchester Road in Front Royal. Long was the \$5,000 grand prize winner of the Entrepreneur Café competition held this week at Lord Fairfax Community College in Middletown. He plans use the money to purchase a pair of bay lifts in the new three-bay addition. Rich Cooley/Daily



Bill Long, owner of Bill Long's Auto Care Clinic, won the Entrepreneur Café grand prize of \$5,000 and a \$3,500 marketing package this week at at Lord Fairfax Community College's Carron Community Development Center.

Long was one of six finalists who made their Shark Tank"-style business pitches on Tuesday to judges on everything from IT solutions to a baking business.

The café awarded the grand prize based on the decision of the event's six judges: Marilyn Finnemore, owner of Bright Box; Darla Guevremont, owner of Distinctions LLC; John Elrick, SCORE mentor and distinguished toastmaster; Len Capelli, director of the Clarke County Industrial Development Authority; Dennis Dysart, COO and president of First Bank.

Long said the \$5,000 will be used to further his small business, a general repair shop in Front Royal that services both foreign and domestic cars. The \$3,500 marketing package includes membership to four area chambers of commerce.

"Bill Long's plan was very solid," said Elrick. "He demonstrated that he had the revenue streams already coming and he wanted to use the funds for something that's going to generate immediate revenue for his organization, and that was a major selling point."

Part of the contestants' pitches was their planned use of the winnings.

"I've got an expansion going on right now with three bays, and this will pay for a lift and a half pretty much," said Long. "We need three lifts so that's going to cover about half of that."

Long opened his business in 1993 when he was a volunteer firefighter. He has since moved on from firefighting to

working at his auto business full time.

Long takes pride in the way he treats his employees and said that's part of what differentiates him from other garages.

"I wanted to work Monday through Friday so I could enjoy weekends and go to my kids' games on the weekends, and consequently that's the schedule my employees work, too," said Long. "I'm able to attract really good employees; I'm able to attract high-quality mechanics."

Long also vaunts the work done by his staff.

"We go the extra mile. We listen to the customer complaint," said Long. "We know what questions to ask so we can more accurately solve their problem. Our diagnoses and repairs are more accurate and a little faster sometimes."

In addition to keeping his employees happy, Long also values his community.

"I've got some employees that depend on and rely on me," said Long. "We're paying taxes to the county. It's good for the community and it's good for us."

The Entrepreneur Café also awarded a "people's choice" award of \$750 to Laura Gomez of Route 11 Outfitters, a Woodstock-based, outdoor outfitting company that conducts tube and kayak trips on the Shenandoah River's North Fork. The company also offers guided hunting and fishing trips.

Gomez says she plans to use the winnings to go toward supplies and equipment for their kids camp, which they began offering this season.

Gomez owns Route 11 Outfitters with her partner Gary Phillips. They have been open for about a year. The unique nature of what Route 11 does gives them an advantage, according to Gomez.

"We currently are the only river outfitter on the North Fork," Gomez stated in an email on Wednesday. "Prior to us opening, people could come to the area to see the seven bends of the Shenandoah but they didn't have a way to take advantage of it."

Route 11 is a family oriented operation.

"We strive to provide a relaxing family oriented experience," said Gomez. "The goal for our business is to grow and be a positive part of this community. We love that we provide a service that encourages people to get outdoors. We want people to visit the Shenandoah Valley and get to experience all the beauty and serenity that comes with the north fork."

Both Gomez and Long praised the Entrepreneur Café and the education they received by participating. Long said it was a rewarding experience.

"I didn't miss a class. I didn't want to be late for a class. I knew I had a lot to learn, and I still have a lot to learn," said Long. "I know I don't know everything and I knew a business plan would be a good idea."

Gomez said they were honored and humbled to be chosen for the people's choice award

"It was a great experience to meet and learn about so many organizations that are right here in the valley and the services they provide to help small business owners," she said.

This was the first time that an event of its kind was held at LFCC and was a success, according to Leslie Currle, business development manager for People Inc., a nonprofit human services agency that co-sponsored the event.

"The Entrepreneur Café Committee has been so passionate and dedicated to raise awareness and bring educational opportunities to promote entrepreneurs in the Valley," Currle stated in an email. "We are pleased with the level of enthusiasm, professionalism and dedication from the entire group of participants...It is what we had hoped for and we hope to grow this event every year going forward."

Contact staff writer Nathan Budryk at 540-465-5137 ext. 155, or nbudryk@nvdaily.com

Home > Local News > Business

'Shark Tank'-like competition comes to LFCC

Area businesses to pitch ideas to panel

Nathan Budryk

3:29 pm Friday, March 11, 2016

A 'Shark Tank'-esque competition will be held at Lord Fairfax Community College's Caron Center at the Middletown campus on April 19.

As many as 15 participants made up of regional small business owners are expected to compete for the first place cash prize of \$5,000 and a marketing package valued at more than \$3,500.

The program is five weeks long, culminating with a final presentation and award night from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on April 19.

"The Award Night promises to be a great event. Our top five participants will each have five minutes to make their pitch, followed by a brief question and answer session," said Leslie Currle, business development manager for People Inc., a nonprofit human services agency based in Woodstock.

A panel of judges composed of local business leaders will be responsible for selecting winners.

"The judges will make their decision for the grand prize winner," Currle said. "However, we will also have an 'audience favorite' award. We are encouraging friends, family and community members to attend the award night. The admission is \$10. Each audience member will receive one vote. The participant with the most audience votes will win the pool of admission fees. That could be pretty substantial as well."

The Regional Entrepreneur Café is the force behind the event.

"It's the first regional entrepreneur effort that encompasses partners from each county in the Northern Shenandoah Valley," Currle said. "The program is designed to bring together entrepreneurs and regional resources through networking, educational components and competition to assist our participants in developing a sound business plan and tools to assist them in their business operations."

Prior to the competition, participants took part in a six-week educational portion of the program in which business owners were taught how to better develop business plans as well as management and profit maximization.

The educational portion includes the elements of a business plan, cash flow planning and understanding your financial position, financial resources, business operations, insurance and marketing and social media, Currle said. "The classes meet once per week and are taught by local business professionals."

Currle noted that she is excited about about the momentum the Regional Entrepreneurial Café is generating for entrepreneur development in the northern Shenandoah Valley.

"We are seeking to create a sustainable program that will develop an ecosystem that will inspire and develop small business owners in our communities," she said. "Both programs will become an annual event, with the hopes of growing larger, becoming a pipeline for additional start-ups and creating job growth in the valley."

View more information on the competition at <http://tiny.cc/ms1z9x> or contact the Small Business Development Center at Lord Fairfax Community College.

Contact staff writer Nathan Budryk at 540-465-5137 ext. 155, or nbudryk@nvdaily.com

0 Comments

Sort by **Oldest**



Add a comment...

Facebook Comments Plugin

[Comment Policy](#)

[Print This Article](#)

« [Jason Wright: Don't judge my family, I won't judge yours](#)

[Cement truck overturns off I-81](#) »

Business

Local News

Hot Ads	CLASSIFIEDS
------------	--------------------

NV Daily Newsletter

Today's breaking news and more in your inbox

Email Address

[Subscribe](#)

- Local News
 - Front Royal
 - Crime
 - Shenandoah County
 - Warren County
 - Courts
- Sports
 - Scores
 - Strasburg High School
 - Sherando High School
 - Central High School
 - Skyline High School
- Lifestyle
 - Entertainment
 - Food

Council reaches tax rate impasse

Majority favored current levy, but vote fell short of minimum

By KEVIN OLMSTEAD
The Sentinel

FRONT ROYAL — For a few seconds after the Town Council voted 3-2 Monday night to keep the real-estate tax rate at 13 cents per \$100 of assessed value, it looked as if that might happen.

Then Town Attorney Doug Napier reminded council members that tax rate votes require four of them to be in favor. The motion failed on first reading.

No residents spoke during the public hearing on the tax rate, which was held during Monday night's council meeting. However, council members had plenty to say about whether the increase is needed and the cost of the future police station for which it would pay.

Council has advertised a tax rate of 14 cents per \$100, with the extra penny being earmarked to the new police station project. That penny would be rescinded once the police station debt is paid off.

That figure was advertised as a safety measure because the council cannot raise the rate once it is advertised. It can only lower it.

It may be too soon to take the penny off the table given the cost escalation of the police station, said Councilman Gene Tewalt, who voted against leaving the tax rate at 13 cents along with Vice

See **RATE**, Page A3

SWIM WITH THE SHARKS

Contest gives area entrepreneurs a chance to win \$5,000 for firms

By JOSH GULLY
The Sentinel

FRONT ROYAL Small business owners in the Shenandoah Valley will be pitted against each other during the Regional Entrepreneur Café event in an attempt to claim a \$5,000 prize to aid their companies' growth.

The competition is similar to the Shark Tank television show, in which entrepreneurs vie for investments from wealthy investors.

The Regional Entrepreneur Café drew 18

Want to watch?

- **What:** Regional Entrepreneur Café competition finals
- **When:** 6 p.m. April 19
- **Where:** Comm Center, Lord Fairfax Community College, Middletown.
- **Admission:** \$10

participants including four from Front Royal and Warren County who paid a \$50 entry fee, said Marla Jones, director of marketing and business development

for the Front Royal-Warren County Economic Development Authority and one of the organizers of the contest.

To qualify for the event, entrepreneurs had to be in business for one year and operate in Frederick, Clark, Warren, Shenandoah and Page counties, the City of Winchester or the Town of Front Royal.

"It's not so much about each individual, small community. It's about creating a regional brand. We want every small business in the Northern Shenandoah Valley to know that they have an opportunity to plant their seed and grow here in this region," Jones said.

See **SHARKS**, Page A6

Christendom College sophomore



Christendom group drops GOP affiliation



Courtesy photo

Elks donate safety glasses to vocational school

Members of the Warren County Vocational School shop class are photographed in the shop with safety glasses donated by Front Royal Elks Lodge 2382. At left are electrical teacher Mike Abel and CTE Coordinator Jane Baker. At right are shop teacher Mark Robinson Elks 2382 Exalted Ruler Dennis Henline. In addition, the Elks recently donated \$1,000 to Samuels Public Library to replace damaged books and \$780 to Restore Hope House & Ministries.

SHARKS

from Page A1

The competing businesses include a farm product producer, a language development professional, an organizational professional, an adventure organizer, a maid company, a cake and candy company and a small information technology firm.

Business owners must complete six classes at Lord Fairfax Community College on topics such as taxes, licensing, legal and accounting issues, marketing, e-marketing and social media.

After the classes, they must develop business plans that will be reviewed by a panel of judges who will select three to five finalists.

On April 19 at 6 p.m. at the Corron Center at Lord Fairfax Community College in Middletown, finalists will present the judges with an elevator pitch and a winner will be chosen based on the

plan and presentation.

There will be a \$10 entry fee for the audience, which will vote on the best business. The winner of the au-

dience vote will receive money collected from the entry fees.

"We're inviting the entire region to come witness . . . the finalist give their final pitch about their business, their need, their hope for expansion," Jones said.

Fundraising for the event started in January, and there is a long list of sponsors, including: Bright Box, First Bank, Dish/Via Satellite, Valley Health, Aire Serv, Joe's Steakhouse, Clarke County, LD&B Insurance, Inter-Change and Symbnax.

In addition to the \$5,000 prize, the winner will receive a marketing package worth about \$3,000, Jones said.

"They have to have a product or a service that they need in order to take their business to the next level, and that's what we will pay for. We're not just going to hand off \$5,000 in cash," Jones said.

The idea for the Entrepreneur Café originated from a local version of the event held the previous two years by the Front Royal Chamber of Com-

merce Small Business Committee.

"A couple of us from the committee decided, well let's take this to the region and see if we can't get a broader audience, a broader group of participants," Jones said.

Jones said part of the reason event's rollout has been successful is due to the coordinated effort between different communities. She said Virginia and the federal government have recently encouraged regional partnerships.

Jones added The Entrepreneur Café is not just about any individual county or town, but their places in the larger community, "because a rising tide lifts all boats."

20th
Order early... Palms, Growns & Easter Lilies

Donahoe's Florist

Jean Rudacille, Owner

(540) 635-2815 • 1-800-806-5182

205 S. Royal Ave., Front Royal, Va.

All major credit cards accepted 2 Blocks South of the Court House

Experience You Can Trust

Licensed in Virginia and West Virginia

Melanie Hamel

Associate Broker
ABR, OLS, CRS, SRS

540-671-3369

melanie@melaniehamel.com

www.melaniehamel.com



Weichert Realtors,
824 John Marshall HWY
Front Royal, VA 22830



SUBSCRIBE - CALL 635-4174

Don't forget your carpet & tile flooring when doing your Spring Cleaning

Spring Carpet Cleaning Special

\$125 up to 500 sq. feet

\$225 up to 900 sq. feet

Min. of \$75.00.

Serenity Cleaning Solutions

Carpet • Upholstery • Stone • Tile • Duct
Commercial & Residential

540-671-3774

Owned and Operated by
Kerry & Wendy Young

Front Royal, VA

Call Today
for a
FREE
Estimate

