

2017

Muskegon Innovation Hub

THE SURGE

Collaboration Is Key



The Muskegon Innovation Hub's mission is to "Serve as a business innovation center that provides coaching, funding, networking, and a synergistic work environment to help businesses and entrepreneurs maximize their growth potential." This means we work very closely with our clients to help them turn innovative ideas into successful business ventures.

While we work hard to serve our innovators and entrepreneurs to the best of our ability, we are a small team and it is often necessary to partner with other business support organizations to better serve our clients. It takes a village to raise something worthwhile, and the same concept applies to our clients here at the Hub. We often work with clients that need intense, focused assistance, and sometimes that means collaborating with other business service providers to help get them the assistance they need.

Over the past year, we've collaborated with many of West Michigan's outstanding organizations and with others across the state. Just to list a few:

- We have partnered with Grand Rapids Opportunities for Women (GROW) to help develop and promote our Marketing Mondays series, as well as to cohost and sponsor a three-part series here at the Hub that focuses on marketing strategies for small businesses. GROW has office hours at the Hub on a regular basis.
- We work very closely with the Michigan Small Business Development Center (SBDC) on a variety of projects, including client consulting and program development. Alongside GROW, SBDC is a cosponsor of our Marketing Mondays series.
- The Muskegon Angels uses the Hub as its home base. They have been a key sponsor for the Hub's 5x5 Nights and are an important funding source for innovators here in West Michigan.
- The Muskegon Inventors Network also makes its home at the Hub. Their connection to inventors in Muskegon and West Michigan make them a perfect fit.
- Muskegon Community College, another key Hub partner, is getting ready to open their new Fab Lab in downtown Muskegon and we are very excited about sharing resources in an effort to best serve present and future clients.

This list is by no means exhaustive, but one thing is clear: there is no way we could provide our clients with the support services they need without the assistance of the many resource partners we work with on a regular basis. At the end of the day, we all have the same goal, and that is to create a thriving economy in West Michigan by helping the state's inventors, entrepreneurs, and small businesses succeed.



Hub Client Updates

Pumpndo

As a nursing mom who works full time outside of the home, Julie Burrell knows all too well the challenges of balancing breastfeeding and a career. Frustrated by the lack of support for busy moms, Julie founded Pumpndo and developed an innovative, hands-free pumping accessory for moms. Julie started in the Hub's incubator program in October of 2016, and has had a fantastic year. The Pumpndo was featured in both MLive and Oceana's Herald-Journal in March. In June, as founder and owner, Julie won the West Michigan InnovateHer pitch competition, sponsored by the Small Business Association GROW, and the Michigan Women's Foundation. Following this lead, the Grand Rapids Business Journal later ran a special about Julie and her product. In August, she celebrated Pumpndo's one-year business anniversary and was featured in interviews on both National Public Radio and WZZM 13. Pumpndo was also selected as a finalist in the Michigan Women's Foundation 2017 Dolphin Tank business plan and pitch competition, and will be pitching on November 10 at Grand Valley State University.

Sales of the Pumpndo-Hands-free Pumping Accessory are steadily growing, and Julie added new products to her lineup, including a scarf and a new size of the Pumpndo to better serve her customer base. In addition to business coaching, the Hub worked with Pumpndo to receive a Business Accelerator Fund grant this year, using the state grant funds to pay for key marketing services. Learn more by visiting pumpndo.com.

Davmaril Enterprises

David Anderson was tired of using his truck as an expensive stand for hitch accessories like grills, tailgate tables, and worktables, so he invented the Hytch-Hyker to move these outdoor event fundamentals off of his truck. He founded DavMaril Enterprises and, in January 2017, began the first beta version of his product.

Customer feedback and coaching in the Hub's incubator program led to design improvements and a clear focus on his beachhead market. DavMaril was awarded a Business Accelerator Fund grant for marketing and brand development—work that will ensure a strong brand ecommerce presence when they begin regular sales. The Hytch-Hyker is now close to starting its first production run and launch of regular sales. Learn more by visiting theytch-hyker.com.

Prong Shield

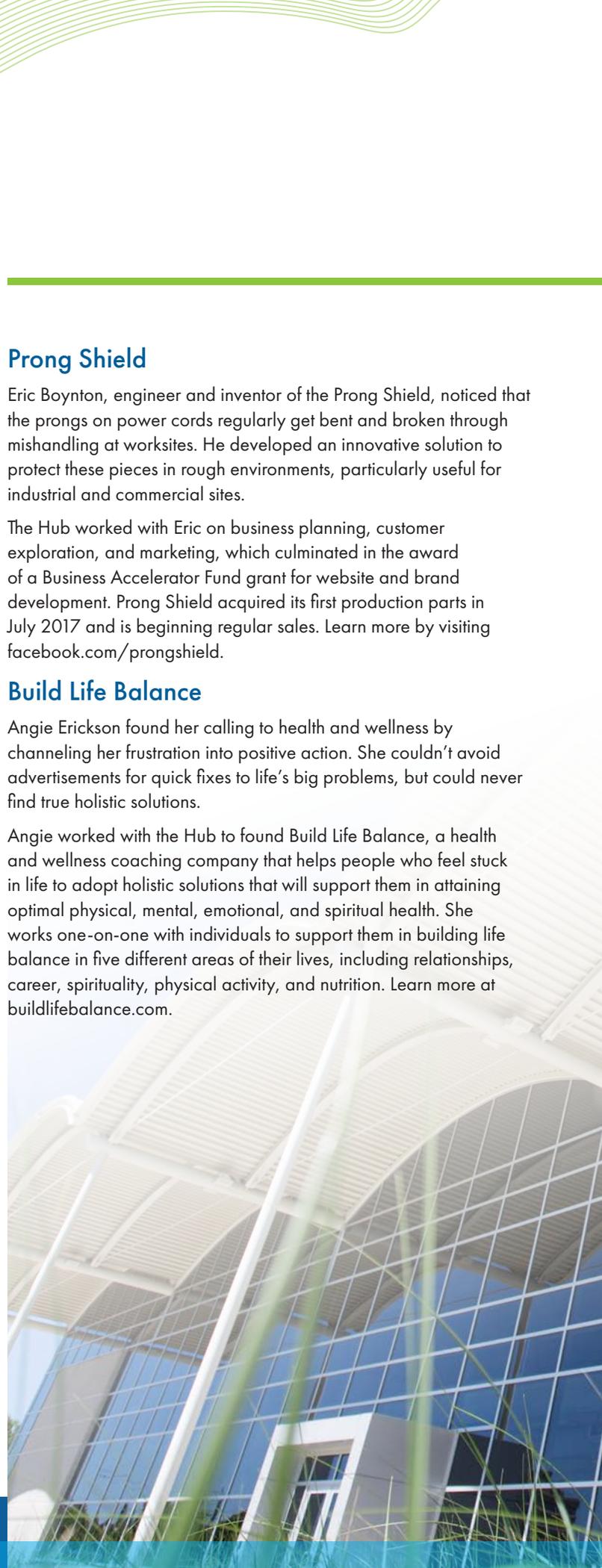
Eric Boynton, engineer and inventor of the Prong Shield, noticed that the prongs on power cords regularly get bent and broken through mishandling at worksites. He developed an innovative solution to protect these pieces in rough environments, particularly useful for industrial and commercial sites.

The Hub worked with Eric on business planning, customer exploration, and marketing, which culminated in the award of a Business Accelerator Fund grant for website and brand development. Prong Shield acquired its first production parts in July 2017 and is beginning regular sales. Learn more by visiting facebook.com/prongshield.

Build Life Balance

Angie Erickson found her calling to health and wellness by channeling her frustration into positive action. She couldn't avoid advertisements for quick fixes to life's big problems, but could never find true holistic solutions.

Angie worked with the Hub to found Build Life Balance, a health and wellness coaching company that helps people who feel stuck in life to adopt holistic solutions that will support them in attaining optimal physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. She works one-on-one with individuals to support them in building life balance in five different areas of their lives, including relationships, career, spirituality, physical activity, and nutrition. Learn more at buildlifebalance.com.



HubMetrics

APRIL 2016-2017 MARCH

Fittedtot

When Ashley Bosch was shopping for baby clothes for her son, she had to repeatedly buy new wardrobes as he grew. She had used clothing rental services for herself before, but she could find nothing in the market out there for children's clothing. That's when she and her husband started Fitted Tot.

Fittedtot is a monthly subscription for parents who want stylish outfits for their kids without the hassle of outgrown clothes and buying new wardrobes every two to three months from retail stores. This service provides shipments of 5-8 new, stylish outfits from boutique vendors each month.

Ashley and her husband work with CoLaunch, which provides Fittedtot with a professional space to work, meet with key partners, and connect with like-minded people to share resources and ideas. Ashley describes CoLaunch as "the perfect place for us to grow, with low overhead and access to many great resources." Learn more by visiting fittedtot.com.

109

new products commercialized

8

new patents issued

9

new companies launched

29

new jobs created

60

companies served

\$7M

in follow-on funding

200

business events held

5,300

people attended


Muskegon Innovation Hub



Community. Creativity. Clients. Coaches. Comradery.

All of these words are synonymous with CoLaunch, the Muskegon Innovation Hub's coworking space. Started in 2016, CoLaunch is a one-stop shop for entrepreneurs, freelancers, remote corporate professionals, and creative thinkers who seek something different than a traditional office space. In addition to providing low-cost workspace and amenities, CoLaunch provides opportunities that extend far beyond the tangible benefits by creating an environment ripe for the cross-pollination of ideas and knowledge sharing.

For those who wonder what the average CoLaunch tenant looks like, we profiled three members to highlight their diverse business endeavors and reasons for joining the CoLaunch community. We think you'll see that they are anything but average.

Meet Thrivepop

ThrivePOP is a spinoff group of Next I.T., a West Michigan company that has provided Web development and IT services since 2001. As Next I.T. continued to expand, it became obvious that their Web development and IT services should be two distinct companies. Out of this decision, ThrivePOP was born.

Launched in July 2017, ThrivePOP is a digital services company that combines Web development with traditional media savvy to help small- and medium-sized businesses make their marketing work for them. What separates ThrivePOP from other Web service providers

is their ability to track and share key metrics with their clients, allowing them to understand and adjust their marketing tactics to fit their business needs.

"It's one thing for a company to run an advertisement when they have a promotion, but it is much more valuable for them to track and measure how their marketing mix is converting into sales," said Michele Ringelberg, owner and CEO of ThrivePOP.

Michele has more than 20 years of experience in marketing and graphic communications, and founded CoLaunch to be an ideal home for her small team, as it provides a high-tech work environment for collaboration along with private meeting rooms for client meetings. Michele plans to use the Hub's physical space and services to grow ThrivePOP, with the intention of hiring more employees and seeking a larger office space in downtown Muskegon in the next year.

"CoLaunch is a temporary location that will help us get up and running," said Michele. "We will continue to utilize services at the Hub until we are ready to jump into a larger, more independent location. Our goal is to have an average growth of approximately 20 percent per year."

In addition to growing the company, Michele is also working towards getting a woman-owned business certification to open up new doors for corporate and governmental business opportunities.

Meet RMS Inc. AND Link2Launch

A transplant from Grand Rapids, Jeff Malec worked at Harris Broadcast in Ohio and Illinois for more than 30 years developing digital and television transmitters. After his children left home for college, Jeff wanted to make his way back to West Michigan.

Jeff became technical director and Michigan manager for RMS Inc.—a resource portal of unique companies for anyone looking for custom human interface, LED lighting, decorative products, and contract design. Joining RMS Inc. afforded Jeff the opportunity to headquarter his sales territory in Muskegon. In need of a flexible office space, Jeff joined CoLaunch.

"I learned about the Hub a few years ago through the Muskegon Inventors Network," said Jeff. "I joined CoLaunch to be able to connect with other entrepreneurs, host customer meetings/seminars, and offer workspace for my employees, which was not feasible in a home office. I have found amazing synergies with other small businesses who are tenants here."





colaunch

Muskegon's Coworking Space for Connection and Community

As president of the Muskegon Inventors Network and a Hub tenant, Jeff uncovered entrepreneurs' need for product development resources to springboard their ideas into reality, and to help fill the gap, Jeff started Link2Launch, a product design/development company.



"Through Link2Launch, I provide support to entrepreneurs with a product concept that may need assistance in taking things to the next step. I'm currently supporting the work of another Hub client through the Business Accelerator Fund to do an initial study for their product concept."

Over the next year, Jeff plans to gradually grow Link2Launch and continue outreach to prospective businesses for RMS Inc.

Meet Energy Conservation Source

Energy Conservation Source was formed by two complementary businesses who met at the Hub—Chart House Energy and Penters LLC. By collaborating on this joint venture, Chart House Energy and Penters LLC found that they could provide symbiotic energy-saving services to commercial and industrial building owners, utilities, governmental entities and nonprofit organizations. Energy-saving projects performed by Energy Conservation Source include complete management and contracting of upgrades to lighting, heating, ventilation and cooling equipment, insulation, and energy production through solar panels or combined heat and power.

What makes Energy Conservation Source unique is their deep knowledge of the financial incentives and sources to help make energy improvement projects affordable, especially for nonprofit

organizations and governmental agencies. For clients who do not wish to invest in energy reduction equipment, Energy Conservation Source offers leases and power purchase agreements for the energy generation and storage systems they install.

"We focus on customers' needs and follow through on promises we make. With all the complications of running a business or government agency, energy is oftentimes not worried about much," said Rob Rafson of Energy Conservation Source. "We educate our customers about the ways they can save both energy and money, and explain how it can affect the performance of their business."

Energy Conservation Source has been a tenant at the Hub for several years and has taken advantage of both the physical space and collaborative work environment that CoLaunch provides. In addition to interacting with other startup companies, Energy Conservation Source has found the events the Hub coordinates, such as Marketing Mondays, particularly helpful.

"When attending a Marketing Monday, a past Hub tenant came in to talk about social media and how to use (or not use it) as a way to market products or services. The knowledge we gained from the presentation helped us avoid pitfalls that would have consumed precious time and resources. Hearing it directly from someone who has experience was helpful, and at times, entertaining."



Over the next year, Energy Conservation Source plans to expand into utility-scale work and focus on leveraging new energy legislation to grow their business by supporting their customers.

Want to learn more about CoLaunch? Visit www.colaunch.works for additional information.

321 GO

In many ways, Muskegon is not much different than other midsized, recovering industrial towns across the Midwest. Its heritage lies mainly in manufacturing and heavy industry, but that landscape has been rapidly changing over the past few decades. As such, it has been necessary for Muskegon to reinvent itself and change with the times.

In the past ten years, downtown Muskegon has seen much in the way of revitalization. New buildings have been constructed, old buildings have been renovated, and there has been a tremendous influx of new businesses, restaurants, breweries, and events that keep the downtown hopping much of the year. However, there is one industry that is primarily missing from Muskegon's downtown, an industry that is crucial to the community's continued growth and expansion: retail.

To help address this concern, Downtown Muskegon Now (DMN), the organization tasked with helping to foster downtown Muskegon's continued success, partnered with the Hub to put together a unique event that would help to place a new retail business in the downtown area. While the Hub doesn't often work in the retail realm, the innovative nature of this event was a good fit for our program.

In the fall of 2016, the team from DMN and the Hub began researching similar models from across the country in an effort to learn from what others had done. Using elements

from other models, while including some of our own unique concepts, we created a new pitch competition—321 Go!

We decided to conduct the pilot event during the winter/spring of 2017. The event kickoff came in February, when a portal was created to accept proposals from parties interested in starting a retail business in downtown Muskegon. Interested participants were required to submit a contest form along with a complete business plan.

They had three weeks to submit this information to be considered for the pitch contest. Once the submission deadline passed, a panel was selected to review the submitted plans and select the four finalists.

The final pitch presentation night was April 13th, and took place with the hope that the event would bring out a large and supportive crowd from the community. The evening did not disappoint. All four finalists were given five minutes to present their pitch to a panel of judges, and when the final pitch had been given, the judges convened and selected the winner.

The winning prize package included six months of free rent (all inclusive) in a downtown retail space and a basket of business services valued at more than \$15,000. These services included

legal assistance, business coaching/counseling, a one-year Chamber of Commerce membership, website development assistance, and architectural design services to help design and build out the space.

By accepting the prize package, the winner committed to a 12-month lease beyond the six free months, with the full 18-month commitment set to start on July 1, 2017.

While the event, by any measure, was considered a success, our team learned much from this initial run. Going forward, we look to improve upon our original model and make it available for communities outside

of downtown Muskegon. It is a great way to get municipalities, businesses, citizens, and civic organizations to come together to help foster retail growth in critical downtown areas.



Hub Events

Marketing Mondays



Turning a new idea or technology into a successful business requires a constant focus on customers. Who is the customer? What do they need and want? Does our offering address their interests? How will we reach them and what will we say about ourselves? How will we know if we are serving them well and are achieving our objectives?

Addressing these and many other questions critical to the success of a new business is the focus of the Hub's newest program—Marketing Mondays. Held on the third Monday of every month, this new series brings in marketing professionals who provide practical knowledge on an array of topics, from concept to specifics, to help entrepreneurs build their businesses through marketing and sales. Recognizing that there is much to learn from peers, these sessions are highly interactive and information sharing is highly encouraged.

Given the digital nature of most markets today, the first several programs have focused on how to develop an effective and comprehensive digital marketing strategy. Topics covered have included goal setting, content management, video production tips and tricks, and using site analytics effectively. A main focus of these sessions has been how to maximize the impact of the digital world's biggest workhorses, such

as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and other popular forms of social media.

Of course, the intent of our Marketing Mondays program is to go beyond just digital marketing. Future sessions will cover such topics as graphic design, market research, public relations, and much, much more.

If you are interested in learning more about how to effectively market your business, or if you just want to hang out with other cool entrepreneurs, come join us for Marketing Monday!

5X5 Night



Building on its past success, the Hub hosted 5x5 Night twice in 2017, again igniting excitement in the local entrepreneurial community. This innovative program, part of Start Garden in Grand Rapids, allows for anyone with a creative concept to pitch their idea to a panel of judges for the opportunity to win \$5,000. The concept: five ideas, five slides, five minutes, five judges, \$5,000. The prize money for both of the 2017 events at the Hub was put up by the Muskegon Angels.

The winner of the January 24th event at the Hub was Josie Richardson, owner of Love Bites Treatery. The prize money helped allow her to open her first storefront business in the Western Market in downtown Muskegon.

Connor Moynihan, the founder of High Hopes Hammock Company, won the August 29th event. High Hopes Hammock Company donates a hammock, a meal, or survival kit to someone living in poverty for every hammock sold. Since 2015, the company has sold more than 2,500 hammocks, making donations all over the world.

Creative Conversations



The Hub's Creative Conversations program brings nationally recognized entrepreneurs to our facility to share their knowledge with a broad audience. In March, the Hub hosted Cynthia Kay, author of several books, including *Small Business for Big Thinkers*. The event, sponsored by Shelby State Bank, captivated attendees who listened intently as Cynthia shared ideas to make a small business successful by engaging with larger companies. After the program, Cynthia was kind enough to spend the morning with attendees, answering questions and personally signing copies of her book. Look for more Creative Conversations coming in 2018!

Introducing Our New Team Members



Rose Bennett

Rose joined the team in March 2017 as our administrative coordinator, coming to us with many years of finance, operations, human resources, and administrative experience in the United States and abroad.

In her role, Rose has a myriad of responsibilities, including finance

management, facility rental, event coordination, student employee supervision, and administrative support. A utility player, she is energized by finding solutions to inefficiencies and streamlining procedures—a skill set critical to ensuring all Hub operations are well conceived and executed.

When asked what she enjoys most about her new role, Rose said, “There is a great amount of momentum and activities at our facility. We work diligently every day to find new innovative ways to serve our clients. There truly is never a dull moment!”

Prior to joining the Hub, Rose worked with several small businesses in varied capacities, including finance, operations, and human resources. While working for the City of Aspen, Colorado, Rose helped to overhaul the financial and operational procedures of the Wheeler Opera House. Before that, Rose lived in Switzerland and founded an international relocation firm to support expatriates.



Allison Wisneski

Allison joined the Hub team in September 2017 as our business incubator manager, coming to us with a rich background in communication, public relations, and business development.

In her role, Allison works to recruit and expand the growth of entrepreneurial businesses at the Hub. She manages

the day-to-day operations of the Hub’s business incubator and helps connect entrepreneurs to the appropriate resources to grow or launch new products or services. In addition to supporting Hub clients, Allison also leads event planning

As a freelancer herself, Allison understands the challenges that small businesses and innovators encounter. When asked what she’s looking forward to working at the Hub, Allison said “The Muskegon region has a wealth of entrepreneurs and businesses that I can’t wait to connect with. I am excited to be a part of the growing entrepreneurial community where I can share expertise and resources to help innovators thrive.”

Prior to joining the Hub, Allison worked in various member relations and communication roles that have helped her understand the pulse of the business community. Some of her past positions include corporate communications at Shape Corporation, the member relations manager at the Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce, a project manager at Revel, and the marketing and communication manager at Girl Scouts of Michigan Shore to Shore. She holds a bachelor of arts in public relations from Central Michigan University.



**GRAND VALLEY
STATE UNIVERSITY**

**MUSKEGON
INNOVATION HUB**

200 Viridian Drive, Muskegon, Michigan 49440
Phone: (616) 331-6900

gvsu.edu/mihub