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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 10, 2015

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Cal Poly Grads Win 4th Annual Startup Weekend SLO

Competition Fosters New Business Ideas from University Students

SAN LUIS OBISPO — A trio of Cal Poly graduates who work together at a San Luis Obispo software company won the 4th annual Startup Weekend SLO, which gives entrepreneurs a chance to pitch their ideas, test and launch their firms — all in 54 hours.

Scott Burns, Anthony Lipscomb Jr. and Hyung Park's startup, Collectively, an Android application, edged out more than 110 other competitors on a dozen other teams in the competition held Jan. 16-18.

"Our goal with Collectively is to foster meaningful, lasting relationships between charity and nonprofit organizations and donors," said Burns, a 2014 Cal Poly graphic communication graduate. "Our service allows donors to easily locate the organizations they have an interest in."

Startup Weekend is a nonprofit organization and features events across the country and internationally, said Chelsea Brown, manager of Student Innovation Programs at the Cal Poly Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship, which co-sponsored the event with the student-run Cal Poly Entrepreneurs club.

"Our event, in particular, aims to get students to interact with people in the community and see how much fun it is to build a business in a matter of 54 hours," Brown said. "Essentially you have 54 hours to build everything out."

Ideas that take shape during the largely sleepless weekend can live on after the competition concludes. Participants brainstormed ideas, conducted market research and developed the concept before presenting their ideas to a panel of four judges.

The judges were Brian Granger, an associate professor of Physics at Cal Poly; Matt McGunagle, CEO & co-founder of StrengthPortal, a software firm for personal trainers and gyms; Mary O'Brien, a marketing vice president at SimplePastimes, one of the largest online jigsaw puzzle retailers in the nation; and Jay Schultz, a senior software engineer at Workday, a software technology leader that builds cloud applications for human resources and finance.

"Collectively, the first-place winner, wants to continue on with their project, as does third-place winner Paxology," Brown said. "A lot of people use the weekend as a jumpstart to get their idea going, to formulate a team around it, and to do some development on the product and some development on the customer segment sort of thing."

Burns agreed.

"Startup Weekend gave us a framework for how to approach market validation, and the mentors were able to steer us in the right direction," he said. "We learned how to develop a business model that would allow our company to grow successfully."

The trio works at MindBody, a business management software firm that works with spas, salons, and yoga and fitness studios. Lipscomb, a Cal Poly computer engineering grad, is a mobile engineer there; Park, who graduated with a degree in art and design, is a junior user-experience designer; and Burns is a software test technician.

The group received a three-month pass to work in the SLO HotHouse, as well as admission to the Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship's Hatchery Program, which both help participants take a business from idea to launch.

"We all feel very passionately about the idea and believe we can create a platform that will allow many organizations, groups, and maybe even individuals or projects to reach their full potential," Burns said.

Photo information: 'Startup.jpg' - From left, Scott Burns, Hyung Park and Anthony Lipscomb present their startup idea, Collectively, at the 4th annual Startup Weekend SLO. The trio of Cal Poly graduates edged out more than 100 other competitors on a dozen other teams at the event. (Photo by Jay Thompson, Cal Poly)

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