

Miami Dade College's inaugural Startup Challenge: And the winners are ...

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Photos by Carlos Llano/Miami Dade College

Leando Finol, executive director of the Idea Center, and Matt Haggman, Miami program director of the Knight Foundation, flank the winners of Miami Dade College's Startup Challenge: Socrate Elie and Felix Puello of Onetown Boards. Below, Puello and Elie pose at their display.

Four months of work came down to this: Six finalists pitched for prize money and bragging rights at Miami Dade College's inaugural Startup Challenge on Wednesday. Leandro Finol, executive director of the Idea Center, said the entrants came from all MDC campuses and many different areas of study.

The grand prize, \$5,000, went to Onetown Boards, which presented a prototype for an interactive experience for skaters. Second place, winning \$3,000, was Marketing Connections, a provider of affordable, high quality, digital marketing solutions for small businesses, and third place, also winning \$3,000, was Hi Foods, a food cart offering a variety of healthy, alternative seafood options.

"We offer a waterproof longboard with dual cameras, one that points forward and one pointing toward the rider, with lights and LED lighting for safety, a speedometer and distance tracker that can be viewed in an LED screen," said Felix Puello, who pitched Onetown Boards – his first business – in the contest and said his Idea Center mentor has been helping him every step of the way.

Puello, who has an art and design background, at first was hand-painting skateboards, but came up with the idea for a teched-up board that would both record the skater's experiences and mitigate safety risks. The business student from MDC's North Campus and his business partner, Socrate Elie, will use the \$5,000 for product development and the patent process. "I'm meeting with engineers tomorrow," said Puello, who is also planning a Kickstarter campaign.

In all, 80 teams participated in the Challenge. Finol said it is not just about winning but the education – each contestant now knows how to start a business. "We planted the seeds of a program that will become part of the DNA of Miami Dade College in years to come."

