



SIGN IN | REGISTER



Subscribe to Crain's



E-mail alerts



search Cleveland Business...

THIS WEEK'S ISSUE NEWS BLOGS SHALE CRAIN EVENTS LISTS & DIRECTORIES MULTIMEDIA EVENTS SERVICES ADVERTISE

Like {20}

SPECIAL SECTION: ENTREPRENEURIAL EXCELLENCE

Regional startup momentum is providing broad path for diverse set of entrepreneurs

By JUDY STRINGER

Originally Published: January 31, 2015 4:30 AM Modified: January 31, 2015 1:05 PM

Entrepreneurs often are heralded as heroic figures, risk-takers who put it all on the line to live out the dream of starting their own business.

To be sure, there is some degree of risk in any new venture. Yet, what makes an individual entrepreneurial has less to do with courage and more to do with creativity and conviction, according to local company founders, funders and business insiders.

And, they said, there is no lack of either in Northeast Ohio.

"All the ingredients are here," said Mark Hauserman, director of John Carroll's Muldoon Center for Entrepreneurship, "the educational institutions, a great group of successful entrepreneurs who are willing to counsel and mentor, and organizations, incubators and accelerators, which help support and develop entrepreneurs, all over the place."

Like his colleagues, Hauserman described entrepreneurs as people who pioneer creative ways of solving problems and marshal the resources to develop their solutions. He also echoed the sentiment that Northeast Ohio entrepreneurs are difficult to pigeonhole.

Some are "momprenuers" seeking to blend flexibility with professional growth, or recent retirees wanting to reinvent themselves. Many are mid-career professionals looking to launch something of their own. Still others are millennials fresh out of college — or even high school — aiming to be the next Mark Zuckerberg.

Categories aside, there are just plain more of them, said Charles Stack, co-founder and CEO of Flashstarts, a Cleveland-based business startup accelerator and venture fund.

"In the mid-1980s, entrepreneur get-togethers in Cleveland were pretty lonely events," he said. "That's not true today. Two years ago, Paul McAvinchey started holding a quarterly entrepreneur get-together called TechPint. Every time he runs one, more people show up. I went to his event last week at Beachland Ballroom and there were probably 400 people there."



Related Links

- » Meet some of NEO's entrepreneurs -- **NATALIE BAUMAN, founder, CEO; The Digital Mosaic**
- » Meet some of NEO's entrepreneurs -- **RICHARD RODMAN, co-founder, CEO, Crowdentials**
- » Meet some of NEO's entrepreneurs -- **SCOTT HUFF, founder, partner; Your e folio**
- » What makes a successful entrepreneur? - **- ETHAN COHEN, team leader, Bizdom Cleveland**
- » What makes a successful entrepreneur? - **- KIP MARLOW, host, Entrepreneurs Club Radio on WINT 1130**
- » What makes a successful entrepreneur? - **- MICHAEL OBI, CEO, Spectrum Global Solutions LLC**
- » What makes a successful entrepreneur? - **- REKA BARABAS, director, Bad Girl Ventures Cleveland**
- » What makes a successful entrepreneur? - **- WHAT READERS HAVE TO SAY**

Sunny Street Café Franchise Opportunity



The United States Marshals Service (USMS) is selling a Sunny Street Café Franchise Restaurant Business located at Gristmill Village Shopping Center, 7531 Crile Road, Concord, OH 44077. This is an operating breakfast, lunch, and catering café.

CRAIN'S
40 UNDER 40

CLICK TO NOMINATE

DEADLINE: JUNE 1

Blogs | **Most Read** | **Recent Comments**

Browns' correction of 'out of whack' ticket prices is a tough sell to long-suffering fans

Cleveland's workers are among the most productive in the nation, analysis shows

Cleveland RTA is among U.S. transit agencies bracing for low gas prices to siphon away riders

Exhibiting at a trade show in 2015? Maximize your ROI

LeBron James' return to MVP form places Cavaliers back into title discussion

CRAIN'S
Women

Youth movement

If the TechPint crowd and the stream of aspiring entrepreneurs who come through his door are good indicators, Stack sees the millennial component as the fastest-growing segment of self-starters. Agility is their main advantage, since recent grads often lack the weighty financial and time commitments common among more established professionals.

"We see a lot more young people because they are more willing to take the risk. They don't have much to lose, no family, no house," said Reka Barabas, director of Bad Girl Ventures Cleveland, an incubator devoted to women-owned businesses.

Academic programs are stoking the fire as well. A 2008 research report by the Kauffman Foundation found that the number of entrepreneurship programs at U.S. colleges and universities surged from roughly 100 in 1975 to more than 5,000 in just over 30 years.

There are an increasing number of programs at the high school level too, according to Barabas. She helps University School students launch businesses through its Young Entrepreneur Marketplace. Shaker Heights-based LaunchHouse partners in a high-school accelerator program called LEAP.

Chris Sklarin, president of the Ohio Venture Association, cited programs at Hawken School and Gilmore Academy, just to name a few.

"If kids see examples of (entrepreneurship), they are more likely to think that is something they can do," Sklarin said.

"Catching up"

Women and mid-career professionals are two other fast-growing cohorts in the local entrepreneurial scene. Female-centric programs like Bad Girl Ventures are partly to thank for the spread of women-owned businesses. Equally important is the support from fellow trailblazers, said Shelley Fasulko, owner of Tremont culinary startup Brewnuts.

"It's funny because sometimes women get a bad rap for being exclusionary. In my experience in small business, we are so hugely supportive of each other. Off the top of my head, I can think of five to 10 women who own a business whom I can reach out to at any time," Fasulko said.

Meanwhile, mid-career professionals, or recent retirees for that matter, bring to the table not only insight into their given field and its "pains," but a wealth of contacts that can get them in their customers' doors.

"If you can easily get into a company and have that conversation about how you can help, that is a big win for any entrepreneur," LaunchHouse CEO Todd Goldstein said.

Corporate partnerships and quick sales are especially important in a market like Cleveland, said George Buzzy, where second and third venture rounds don't flow as easily as seed capital. Buzzy, former entrepreneur-in-residence for JumpStart, recently joined Glass Slate Digital to help commercialize the Canal Fulton firm's holograph technology.

Whatever their demographic background, the influx of Northeast Ohio entrepreneurs shows no sign of waning. Industry watchers said Third Frontier's recent announcement that it will devote the \$350 million it has left to entrepreneurial programs statewide, and Cleveland-based JumpStart's new \$1.7 million small business loan program will help sustain the current momentum.

At this point, Stack said, Northeast Ohio may still lag behind other regions when it comes to starting new companies and raising capital, but its trajectory is much steeper.

"We are catching up," he said.



Reader Comments

Readers are solely responsible for the content of the comments they post here. Comments are subject to the site's terms and conditions of use and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or approval of *Crain's Cleveland Business*. Readers whose comments violate the terms of use may have their comments removed or all of their content blocked from viewing by other users without notification. Comments may be used in the print edition at editorial discretion.

0 Comments

Crain's Cleveland Business

Login ▾