



Founders First

Two Years of Impact
Told Through 10 Founder Stories

2022-2023 Impact Report

A Note from Our President & CEO

Alongside our day-to-day work, much of the past two years was spent in reflection. We took the time to examine our organization's first five years, as well as the state of the current Memphis-area entrepreneurial ecosystem. We paused to ask important questions: What has changed and grown? What does our community need today, in this economy? How can we have the biggest impact and offer the greatest value with the resources we have?

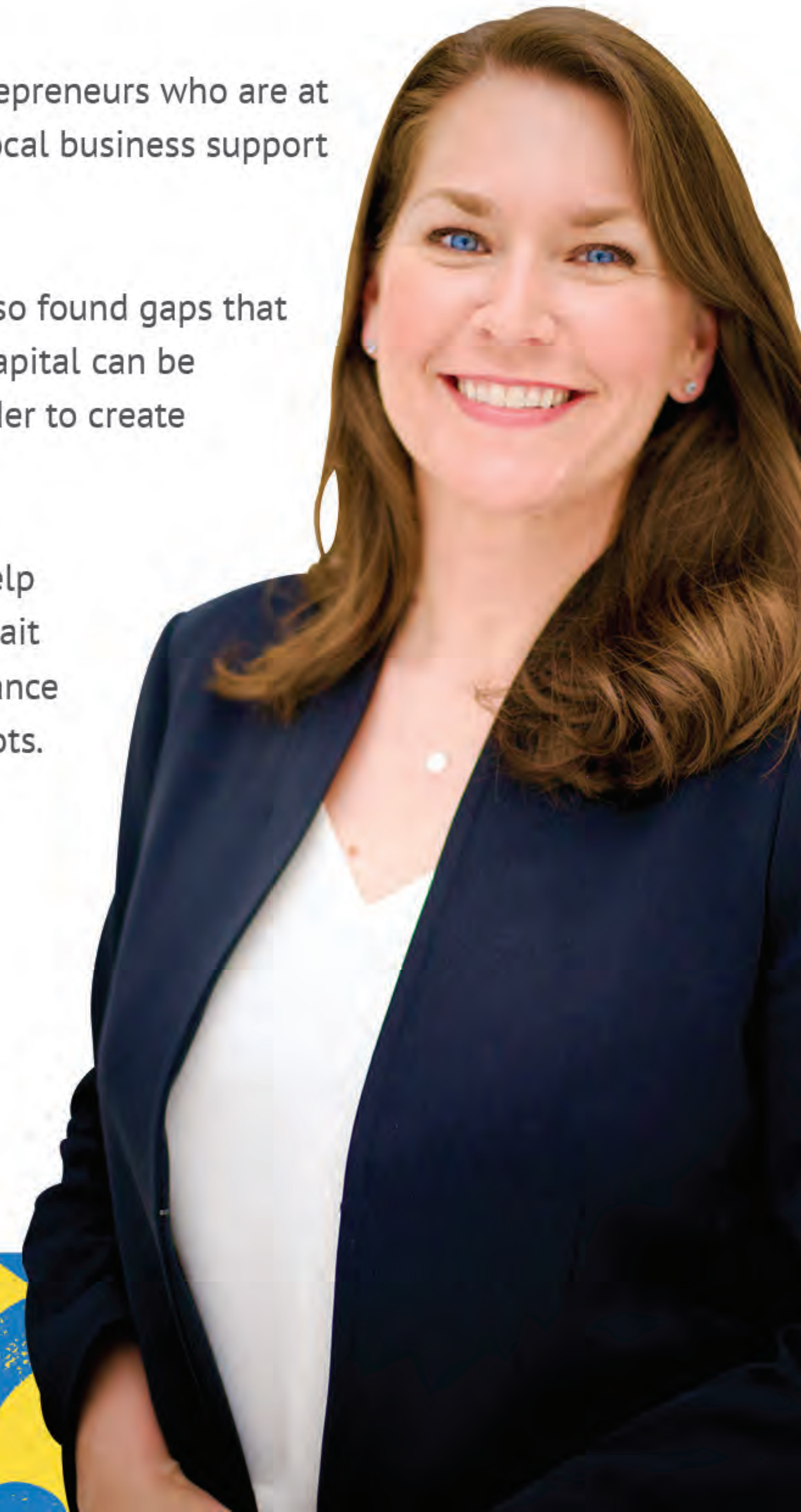
The answers to these questions were uncovered, of course, by putting founders first. We talked with the entrepreneurs who are at the center of our mission – some of whom you'll meet in this two-year report. We also found answers in a local business support network that has new capacity, including partners offering more programs and services for entrepreneurs.

While this ecosystem growth fulfilled one of the long-term goals we set when we launched Epicenter, we also found gaps that remain: Too few of our neighbors see a path to entrepreneurship or opportunities in technology, accessing capital can be difficult, and finding resources is still too mystifying. These are factors we need to continue to address in order to create a more vibrant place to live and work for all of Memphis.

So, we've embarked on a new, focused strategy that is responsive to our ecosystem today. It is intended to help founders scale their businesses and have an exponentially positive impact on our local economy. We can't wait to share more with you as it develops. Underlying this new strategy is our belief in the innovation and brilliance within our citizens. We believe it's our team's job to coax it out, make it easier to activate, and connect the dots.

We hope the stories here demonstrate the innovation and brilliance that is already here and at work. If you find yourself asking how you can help put founders first across our community, reach out to us – we can't do it without you.

Jessica Taveau
President & CEO



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Entrepreneur Engagement 2022-2023

93

Total Events

2,306

All Epicenter Event and
Program Participants

87

Epicenter Program
Graduates



BLACK
ENTREPRENEURS

accounted for

80%

of all program participants.

WOMEN
ENTREPRENEURS

accounted for

67%

of all program participants.

BLACK
ENTREPRENEURS

accounted for

85%

of all program graduates.

WOMEN
ENTREPRENEURS

accounted for

77%

of all program graduates.

From Lab to Launch

With: **Leta Nutt, PhD, founder of Nutt Bio**

Dr. Leta Nutt is in the business of improving the lives of pigs. But for decades, she was getting her hands dirty in a research lab, not on a farm.

Boar taint, a major problem in pig farming, leads to an unpleasant odor in some mature male pigs which can make their meat unsellable. The traditional solution causes pain, discomfort, and increased mortality in piglets.

Dr. Nutt, recognizing the need for a more humane approach, turned her attention to developing a more practical and efficient solution to boar taint. But her career had been one of an academic researcher, not an entrepreneur.

“I have more than 20 years of academic research experience,” says Dr. Nutt, “but I didn’t know how to turn my ideas and research into a minimum viable product that would be of interest to anybody.”

Luckily, Dr. Nutt discovered the Patent2Products (P2P) program offered by Epicenter and the University of Memphis, which helps post-doc fellows start for-profit businesses.

Continued >



Learn more about Nutt Bio
nuttbio.com



“The Patents2Products program helped me turn my research into a bona fide startup,” says Dr. Nutt. “The program provided the knowledge, the tools, and the mentors necessary to succeed.”

While attending and completing the P2P program in 2022, Dr. Nutt had been developing a sterilizing injection that is far safer and more humane than current practices to treat boar taint. Nutt Bio’s non-toxic method has already shown great promise in clinical studies in both rats and piglets. Dr. Nutt’s progress was noticeable outside the lab, too: She took home \$10,000 from a first-place win at the 2023 “Next Big Thing” pitch competition, hosted by the Society of Entrepreneurs and Epicenter.

Nutt Bio is currently collaborating with Tosh Farms in Henry, Tenn., to further the real-world research needed to bring this product to market and fulfill their mission of improving animal welfare.

Program Spotlight
Patents2Products

The University of Memphis and Epicenter created Patents2Products to encourage post-doc fellows to start for-profit businesses, utilizing patented intellectual property developed both in Memphis and across the United States. The P2P post-doc program is a funded position for research entrepreneurs and provides them with the necessary tools for launching a successful startup.

Learn more at memphis.edu/p2p.

**“Without Epicenter,
I would not be an
entrepreneur.”**



Building with Community

With: **Kareem DaSilva, founder of Edesia**

Standing in line after line at food trucks on his lunch breaks, Kareem DaSilva had a thought – “This should be easier!” It’s where many entrepreneurial ideas come from: solving a common problem or pain point. Being an app developer, Kareem started building a solution to streamline the process of ordering from food trucks.

Soon, he discovered a more specific product-market fit and created Edesia, a single platform that helps individuals or companies find, hire, and pay food trucks and caterers for events.

Engaging regularly with food truck owners and event planners, Kareem knows the importance of staying plugged in to the community. “Working at the downtown Epicenter office has been a rewarding experience, and I particularly enjoy the camaraderie of the happy hours and supportive events they organize,” says the founder.

Continued >



Learn more about Edesia
www.edesia.catering



To take the business to the next level, Kareem enrolled in the Binghampton Business Incubator, powered by Cummins Inc., in the fall of 2022.

The three-month program went deep on business strategy and financials, and even landed Edesia a \$5,000 grant after Kareem won a pitch competition. The Incubator further invested nearly \$9,000 to help Edesia build a marketplace that connects food entrepreneurs to corporations with a seamless booking process.

Edesia is currently operational in Memphis and Nashville, with New York, Indianapolis, and Atlanta on the horizon. Since food trucks are everywhere, Kareem recognizes the value of starting up in the middle of it all: “Memphis’s central location in the U.S. is advantageous for travel – whether to the East or West Coast – facilitating the expansion of my professional network.”

Program Spotlight

Binghampton Business Incubator

Powered by Cummins Inc. and hosted by Epicenter, the Binghampton Business Incubator is a three-month program teaching entrepreneurs how to strategically think about their business, financially plan, and properly pitch their business to their customers and/or potential investors. Sessions took place at the Binghampton Development Corporation training center, and the cohort ended with a pitch competition. Kareem and Edesia came in second place, taking home \$5,000 to put toward the business.

“I value the diverse range of programs Epicenter provides.”



Driving Innovation

With: **Erica Plybeah, Founder of MedHaul**

Erica Plybeah has had the same mission for her company, MedHaul, since day one: Eliminate health care transportation barriers for those who need it most. It's a powerful idea that's proven to be a critical component to health care access.

MedHaul's service is particularly invaluable to vulnerable populations, including low-income, elderly, or disabled patients, and those living in rural communities. In fact, the highest demand for MedHaul comes from those seeking access to cancer care, kidney care, maternal care, and behavioral or mental health services.

But MedHaul wasn't always in demand. "I'm not from Memphis, I don't have family here, and I didn't attend high school here, so it was pretty challenging to navigate various networks in the beginning," says Erica. What's more, as a Black woman in tech, she found it more difficult than her peers to initially raise capital.

Continued >



Learn more about MedHaul
gomedhaul.com



“Most folks [in Memphis] weren’t used to seeing Black women as venture-backed tech founders,” says Erica. But when she landed investors like Morgan Stanley and Google, local networks had to pay attention.

Throughout her entrepreneurial experience, Erica looked to Epicenter for support. “Epicenter has been an integral part of our journey from the very beginning,” she reflects. “They’ve provided us with invaluable education, unwavering support, and access to essential resources that have fueled our growth.”

So, where is that growth going next? Erica is currently on the road to expanding across 14 states, including Washington D.C., as MedHaul works toward seamless transportation integration for everyday health care and clinical research.

Program Spotlight

Epicenter Innovation Center Incubation

The Epicenter Innovation Center provides founders like Erica with rent-free workspace equipped with a wealth of resources and opportunities for her and her team. Entrepreneurs enrolled in the incubation program have access to a collaborative coworking environment, skill-building workshops, and events to help grow their networks. The goal? Catalyze innovation and empower the next generation of business leaders to build companies like MedHaul in Memphis. Learn more at epicentermemphis.org.

“Epicenter has been an integral part of our journey from the very beginning.”



Recipe for Success

With: **Mariko & Tiffany Wiley, founders of Riko's Kickin Chicken**

Mariko "Riko" Wiley and his wife Tiffany, the dynamic duo behind Riko's Kickin Chicken, have carved out a remarkable success story in Memphis's culinary scene. Founded in 2014 as a modest food truck, they quickly captured the taste buds of the greater Memphis area. By 2017, Riko's had opened its first brick-and-mortar store in the heart of the Medical District.

Weathering the pandemic and continuing year-over-year growth is a testament to the Wileys' dedication and business acumen. But the Wileys have faced significant obstacles over the years, including limited space, staffing issues, and outdated equipment. The biggest challenge they now face is scaling their business effectively, and that means opening a second location.

Their engagement with Epicenter's Frayser Connect program, fueled by MassMutual Foundation, proved to be a turning point, providing Riko's with the necessary funding to upgrade their equipment and set the stage for expanding the restaurant.

Continued >



Learn more about Riko's Kickin Chicken
rikos-kickin-chicken.business.site



“Frayser Connect allowed us to acquire much-needed equipment to help improve productivity at the current location, and allowed us to realistically visualize our dream of a second location, and begin the process of making that dream a reality.”

Choya Johnson, Epicenter’s Capital Programs Specialist, has been Riko’s advisor throughout the program. “Choya has been an angel to our business and family,” the Wileys say. “She has been there for us to help us cope emotionally, educationally, and financially through this landscape.”

The last three years have been a period of significant growth for Riko’s Kickin Chicken. The Wileys have expanded their network, improved their business scaling strategies, and are now on the brink of opening their second location in Frayser, anticipated in 2024.

Program Spotlight

Frayser Connect

Frayser Connect, an investment by the MassMutual Foundation, has been a collaborative economic and community development initiative among Frayser CDC, Epicenter, and RISE Foundation. The program has built local residents’ financial and social capital, with Epicenter running entrepreneurial programming for business owners in the Frayser community.

“Epicenter has truly helped guide and solidify our business model.”



Thirsty for More

With: **Natalie Boyatt, founder of Bevee**

Launched in 2023 by Memphis native Natalie Boyatt, Bevee is a first-of-its-kind drink carrier that lets you hold a dozen drinks with one hand. What's more impressive is this foldable and reusable carrier holds two patents and caught the attention of Amazon Corporate, who offered Natalie an exclusive product launch on their platform last year.

Overcoming the challenges of being a single mother and lacking granular resources for product development, Natalie's seven-year startup journey ultimately led her to Epicenter. Her first pitch in 2020 marked the beginning of a valuable relationship that provided her with access to fundraising opportunities, mentoring, and networking that have helped her navigate the challenges of entrepreneurship.

Thanks in part to Natalie's continued engagement with Epicenter, Bevee was accepted into the first Alchemist Accelerator cohort in Memphis.

Continued >



Learn more about Bevee
bevee.com



Encouraged by her peers and her community, Natalie is passionate about giving back and sharing her journey of growth and perseverance. She has not only built a successful product, but is even publishing a book designed to inspire women entrepreneurs. Wait...Now How Do I Build It? is slated for release in 2024.

Bevee is also set to go global with Amazon in 2024. The upcoming launch of a six-cup carrier, designed to hold various drink sizes, continues the company's innovative streak in targeting the automotive, sports, and hospitality industries. Natalie is also planning to expand the brand's product line beyond drink caddies, including a full-size cooler with a built-in Bevee and other premium drinkware products.

Program Spotlight

Alchemist Accelerator

For its first U.S. location outside of Silicon Valley, Alchemist Accelerator partnered with Epicenter to launch the six-month, venture-backed program in Memphis. The initiative is focused on accelerating early-stage startups that create tech-based solutions for other businesses. Alchemist operates an equity-based, enterprise-venture-focused acceleration program with three classes of 20-30 startups each every year. Ido Sarig, an experienced early-stage startup mentor and coach with global supply chain and connected mobility expertise, leads the Memphis hub as its Managing Director.

“My very first introduction into the entrepreneurial space was with Epicenter toward the end of 2020. Since then they have been wonderful in staying in constant contact with me.”



Partner Spotlight:

Society of Entrepreneurs

Founded in 1991, the Society of Entrepreneurs was created to foster the development of the entrepreneurial spirit in Memphis and to recognize the many contributions entrepreneurs have had in our city.

Through a new partnership, Epicenter and the Society of Entrepreneurs host regular luncheons where the organizations shine a spotlight on Memphis-based entrepreneurs and businesses that exhibit exceptional promise and innovation.

These sessions provide a unique platform for showcasing emerging talent and visionary ideas within our community. With a combination of pitches, presentations, and roundtable discussions, we're able to create opportunities for connections, investment, and mentorship throughout our ecosystem.

This partnership not only connects aspiring entrepreneurs with seasoned business leaders, but also aligns with our broader mission to cultivate a culture of entrepreneurship and creativity across the city.

Find upcoming sessions at epicentermemphis.org/events

“The Society of Entrepreneurs is dedicated to educating and empowering entrepreneurs. Partnering with Epicenter, a leader in supporting emerging entrepreneurs, enhances our mission and impact.”

-Pearson Crutcher, Executive Director, Society of Entrepreneurs



The Next Big Thing

Furthering our partnership with the Society of Entrepreneurs, The Next Big Thing is an annual pitch competition that showcases and supports Memphis startups in their quest for investment.

A highlight of our entrepreneurial programming, the competition serves as a platform for emerging ventures to pitch their innovative ideas and business plans.

The stakes are high, with the first-place winner securing a substantial **\$10,000** investment, and the runner-up receiving a **\$5,000** prize.

The Next Big Thing contributes to the growth and success of promising local startups, and, most importantly, offers founders a unique opportunity to directly engage with experienced members of the Society of Entrepreneurs.

The Next Big Thing **\$10,000** Winners



**Kiamesha Wilson, founder of
Kaye's Pints & Scoops**



Dr. Leta Nutt, founder of Nutt Bio

Sweet Success

With: **Kiamesha Wilson, founder of Kaye's Pints & Scoops**

Kiamesha Wilson's first taste of entrepreneurship came early in life. Growing up she watched her parents, aunts, and uncles lead successful restaurant and beauty ventures, and even ran a small vending machine in her father's business as a child.

Spurred by this family history, Kiamesha turned an in-home hobby of making ice cream for friends during the pandemic into a business concept: Kaye's Pints & Scoops.

Launched in 2022, Kaye's Pints & Scoops is more than an ice cream brand – it's a testament to Kiamesha's commitment to quality and community. "We believe in supporting, buying from, and employing local Memphians," she says. The small-batch creamery prides itself on handcrafted ice cream made with natural, locally sourced ingredients, free from artificial colors.

Kiamesha's entrepreneurial path, like many, came with plenty of challenges. When opening the company's first brick-and-mortar store in 2023, she encountered unexpected costs like building renovations and initial inventory purchases.

Continued >



Learn more about Kaye's & order online
kayesicecream.com



That's where an investment from Epicenter's Friends & Family Fund came in.

"The funding enabled us to finish remaining projects we needed to open, as well as gave us some cash to ensure we were able to maintain the first few months," says Kiamesha. "It really helped us move into the launch phase."

Today, Kaye's Pints & Scoops has grown into a full-fledged creamery, currently featured in 15 stores and boasting 18 rotating flavors. Kiamesha continues to innovate, planning novel items and collaborations with local flavor makers.

Her biggest challenge now lies in scaling the business effectively. She remains focused on finding the right product mix to remain cost-effective and profitable while keeping quality high. Throughout her journey, she has relied on a strong family support system and connections with fellow entrepreneurs to navigate the emotional roller coaster that comes with building a business.

Program Spotlight

Good Food & Fixins

Powered by Truist and hosted by Epicenter, Good Food & Fixins is a business development program supporting emerging consumer packaged goods (CPG) food companies in Memphis and Shelby County. The program is designed to develop marketplace readiness and build capacity through a three-day accelerator, food showcase, one-to-one consulting services, and a pitch competition with prizes ranging from \$2,500 to \$10,000 for up to five recipients.

"It really helped us move into the launch phase."



Pioneering Patient Care

With: **Mark Meyers, founder of NeuroDyne**

Founder of NeuroDyne, Mark Meyers stands at the cusp of medical innovation with his company's cutting-edge wearable seizure monitoring device. The startup's flagship product is set to transform how seizures are managed, providing doctors with the ability to monitor their patients remotely.

The device, a cap worn by patients, wirelessly transmits brain activity data to physicians, offering an unprecedented level of insight into seizure activity. This technology not only detects seizures as they occur, but also provides neuro-markers for impending seizure events. Such predictive capabilities can dramatically enhance patient safety and care.

With the support of local industry leaders, NeuroDyne has immediate access to the Memphis market, which includes approximately 5,000 patients annually. Expanding to a regional scale across four states, the potential patient base grows to half a million.

Continued >



Learn more about NeuroDyne
neurodyne.us



But Mark isn't going at it alone – Epicenter has been an avid supporter in the founder's journey, helping NeuroDyne navigate the complex landscape of starting a biotech business.

“The Epicenter team provided extensive knowledge for our startup,” Mark says, “including valuable insights, networking opportunities, and business guidance.”

NeuroDyne is also a graduate of Epicenter's legacy ZeroTo510 medical device accelerator, one of the most respected and competitive programs of its kind in the U.S. – it accepted less than 8% of all applicants.

NeuroDyne's recent achievement of an NSF SBIR Phase II award is a testament to its potential. The company is now seeking private funding to unlock additional support from NSF SBIR Phase IIB and other statewide investment resources. This funding will be pivotal in transitioning from development to production, bringing this life-changing technology to patients and health care providers.

Program Spotlight **ZeroTo510**

Celebrating 10 years in 2022, Epicenter's ZeroTo510 medical device and health tech accelerator consistently ranked in the top 10 of accelerators in the country. The rigorous curriculum and access to deep industry expertise enabled startups to navigate the FDA regulatory process and ultimately compete in the regulated medical device and health tech marketplace. The program is now expanding its capabilities by focusing on identifying, starting, and fostering regional founders that will grow and develop the Memphis regional ecosystem.

“The Epicenter team provided extensive knowledge for our startup.”



Meeting the Need

With: **Angelita Parham, founder of SteeleDivine Cosmetics**

A cosmetologist by trade, Angelita Parham's livelihood was hit hard by the 2020 pandemic. As many service-based businesses were closing their doors, Angelita was quick on her feet to use her experience to launch a cosmetics product line that didn't rely on an in-person model.

Soon, SteeleDivine Cosmetics was born. What started as a line of lipsticks quickly grew into a full product offering of cosmetics and accessories. Angelita had tapped into an unmet need in her community, which was proven when the time came to open her brick-and-mortar location.

"Big-box brands normally open in high-traffic suburban areas or malls," Angelita says. "It was important to me to bring my brand to an area where there was a need."

That need was met in Whitehaven, a community in South Memphis which turned out in huge numbers for SteeleDivine's grand opening – more than 300 people showed up to celebrate Angelita's new business (when only 60 tickets were initially available).

Continued >



Learn more about SteeleDivine Cosmetics
steeledivinecosmetics.com



To help get her there, Angelita enrolled in the CO.STARTERS program at Epicenter, designed to shorten the time it takes to develop ideas into thriving businesses. “Week by week, we were challenged with sharing our pitch and ideas with others,” says Angelita. “It seemed the more I would pitch my ideas, show up for class, and apply it all to my business model, my business started to make more sense. I believe I signed a lease within two weeks of completing the program.”

In addition to salon services and retail products, SteeleDivine offers makeup tutorial workshops and classes to her customers. Showing no signs of slowing down, Angelita is currently developing a line of all-vegan foundations for beauty lovers.

Program Spotlight
CO.STARTERS

The CO.STARTERS program at Epicenter prepares aspiring entrepreneurs with insights, relationships, and tools needed to turn their business ideas into action. CO.STARTERS is designed to reduce the time it takes to develop ideas into thriving businesses by applying lean business model methods popular with high-growth and tech-based startups. Participants learn how to identify why and how their businesses will work in real-world scenarios in order to rapidly uncover flaws in their concepts and quickly adjust their business models. Learn more at epicentermemphis.org/costarters.

“I owe the jump for opening my business and its success to the entire team at Epicenter.”



On the Up and Up

With: **Venki Mandapati, founder of UpSquad**

Venki Mandapati, founder of UpSquad, is changing the way organizations manage their communities and grow their programs. UpSquad is a comprehensive program management platform that gives organizations of all types a customized, coordinated solution to start, manage, and track their internal and external programs.

Venki's entrepreneurial journey began as an international student at The University of Memphis. Seeing the potential for technology to solve real-world challenges, he embarked on a path of entrepreneurship, with Epicenter on his side from the start.

"Epicenter has been instrumental in shaping UpSquad from its idea stage," Venki says. "The unique thing about Epicenter is it offers programs catering to entrepreneurs at various stages of development."

Continued >



Learn more about UpSquad
upsquad.com



Venki has participated in Epicenter's annual pitch competition twice, each time gaining valuable feedback from potential investors that significantly shaped UpSquad's direction. Participating in the Alchemist and Epicenter pre-accelerator program has also proved valuable in identifying key areas for growth.

Expanding on that valuable relationship, UpSquad's and Epicenter are embarking on a new strategic partnership to establish a Mentor Network platform that runs on UpSquad's technology.

With significant progress over the last few years, UpSquad has worked with more than 20 customers across different sectors, developing custom web and mobile applications to effectively manage their programs. Venki's vision isn't just to see UpSquad succeed – he wants to see his customers succeed as well.

Program Spotlight
Mentor Network

The Epicenter Mentor Network is a new partnership with Memphis-based startup UpSquad to expand the networks of emerging entrepreneurs who aspire to scale and expand their businesses. One of the platform's core features enables founders to match with seasoned mentors and subject-matter experts with deep industry connections. This strategic partnership gives startups a uniquely tailored mentorship experience to help them thrive in Memphis and beyond.

“Memphis provides a supportive environment for innovation.”



Businesses Supporting Businesses

With: **Stuart Lott, founder of Backbone**

Stuart Lott, a native Memphian, saw a critical gap in the small business sector: the overwhelming hours owners spend on managing business finances. To help solve this problem, he founded Backbone, an all-in-one financial management platform tailored specifically for businesses that have fewer than five employees, called microbusinesses.

Recognizing Memphis's rich landscape of microbusinesses, Stuart saw his hometown as the perfect launchpad for Backbone. Our city's diverse business environment provides a fertile ground for testing, refining, and expanding Backbone's services.

Stuart credits Backbone's progress to the support and opportunities provided by Epicenter. Working in the Innovation Center, participating in the CO.STARTERS program, and engaging in various workshops and seminars have been invaluable to Backbone's development. Stuart was also one of three founders selected to be an inaugural 901 Entrepreneurs Fellow.

Continued >



Learn more about Backbone
joinbackbone.com



The 901 Entrepreneurs Fellowships, which include a \$65,000 stipend, enable early-stage, underrepresented founders to focus on scaling their business full-time or, for example, to help acquire a piece of equipment or additional staff to accomplish business growth milestones. In addition, fellows receive wraparound services through Epicenter, such as access to subject matter experts and coworking space.

Stuart's goal is to simplify financial management for entrepreneurs without accounting knowledge, allowing them to reclaim time and focus more on revenue-generating activities. The community at Epicenter, including other entrepreneurs and support organizations, has been instrumental in refining this strategy and vision.

Launching in early 2024, Backbone is poised to change financial management for microbusinesses. Looking ahead, Stuart aims to grow Backbone into a global ecosystem of financial solutions, making it easier for entrepreneurs worldwide to start, run, and grow their businesses effectively.

Program Spotlight
901 Entrepreneurs

The 901 Entrepreneurs Program includes business planning, programming, and growth resources to support small businesses and entrepreneurs who have the potential to strengthen the Memphis economy. Funding for the 901 Entrepreneurs Program was secured by Congressman Cohen as part of the final 2023 federal appropriations government funding package and is included in Community Project Funding for projects in Tennessee's 9th District.

“Epicenter has been critical to Backbone’s success thus far. I’m eternally grateful for that.”



Epicenter Capital Report

2022-2023

Total Funding Deployed

\$741,000

Frayser Connect

\$237,000

deployed



16 Businesses Supported
16 Black-owned
12 Women-owned

Friends & Family Fund

\$179,000

deployed



10 Businesses Supported
9 Black-owned
8 Women-owned

Formation Fund

\$325,000

deployed



10 Businesses Supported
5 Minority-owned
4 Women-owned



Frayser Connect

Frayser Connect, an investment by the MassMutual Foundation, is an evolving collaborative economic and community development initiative among Frayser CDC, Epicenter, and RISE Foundation. The program aims to build local residents' financial and social capital, with Epicenter running entrepreneurial programming for business owners in the Frayser community.



Friends & Family Fund

Born of a need to remove barriers to funding, Epicenter's Friends & Family Fund has historically provided non-dilutive, targeted funding for small businesses, both tech-based and community-based, to achieve significant growth milestones with laser-focused infusions of capital to acquire needed equipment or services to reach the next level.



Formation Fund

Epicenter's Formation Fund encourages the founding of new companies that leverage existing industry-specific ecosystems and infrastructure, specifically in supply chain and logistics, medical devices, and agtech. By providing investments and wraparound services in these sectors, Epicenter aims to greatly increase the likelihood of a company's success and de-risk future investment opportunities. The fund is capitalized through charitable donations, and returns are reinvested to an evergreen fund.



Epicenter's POV: The Importance of Capital Readiness

Capital readiness refers to the stage that a business or entrepreneur has reached when they are able to secure capital or investment. Reaching this level requires conducting thorough financial analysis, developing a comprehensive business plan or roadmap, and fine-tuning the business model. It also involves building a strong network of contacts and relationships within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, both locally and nationally. We ensure every founder and business we fund reach capital readiness through programming, mentorship, network access, and ongoing community support.



Support Entrepreneurs. Put Founders First.

When we invest in entrepreneurs, they change the fabric of our city for the better.
Donate your time, expertise, or dollars, and help Epicenter put Founders First.

epicentermemphis.org/invest



Expect More in 2024

As an organization and a community, Epicenter has evolved over the past two years. Our core ideals haven't changed (and neither will our support for our current portfolio of companies), but our focus is shifting to include more high-growth, high-tech companies.

Sound exciting? It is!

Don't miss some major announcements coming in 2024 – join our mailing list at epicentermemphis.org.

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Manager



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Kayla Rodriguez Graff

Co-founder and CEO, SweetBio

Dr. Lisa Wade

Director, Hayes Center for Practice Excellence, Southern College of Optometry

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Thank You!

**Our investors, donors, and partners make this work possible.
Thank you for putting Founders First and fueling entrepreneurship in Memphis.**

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Vicki Howell



Epicenter's capital readiness programming
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epicentermemphis.org



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Epicenter's capital readiness programming is supported by a CRP grant from the Minority Business Development Agency.