FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT

Alexia Garcia
616.893.2696
agarcia@identitypr.com

# Lake Trust Foundation Awards Small Businesses $20,000 in Funding Support via Entrepreneur Pitch Competition

*The competition nearly doubled the funding given out earlier this year, awarding four Detroit-based small businesses in support of their future business plans*

**BRIGHTON, Mich., Nov. 18, 2026** — The Lake Trust Foundation, an independent charitable organization of Lake Trust Credit Union committed to supporting small businesses across Michigan communities, has announced the winners of its second Entrepreneur Pitch Competition. The new class of winners, 1st Step Healthcare Training, Little Susie Café & Sweetshop, Fruits Coffee Company and Hurley's Coffee & Mercantile, received a total of $20,000 in funding to support their businesses' next chapter of growth.

"Small businesses play an essential role in strengthening our communities, but they reach their full potential when their neighbors rally together to support their success," said Amanda Huszti-Vickers, managing director of the Lake Trust Foundation. "Through the Entrepreneur Pitch Competition, we are not only investing in making these entrepreneurs' goals and dreams a reality but also supporting the growth of their local economies."

"At Lake Trust Credit Union, our focus remains on supporting small businesses, at all stages, in their growth journey," said Nicole Paine, business development manager at Lake Trust Credit Union. "Working closely with local entrepreneurs, we empower them with the resources, strategic guidance and capital they need to pursue their passions and grow their businesses."

To participate in the competition, entrepreneurs must have completed the Lake Trust Entrepreneurship Institute (LTEI), a free, self-paced online business curriculum launched in partnership with Cleary University in 2025. LTEI equips local entrepreneurs with business plan ideation, marketing, financial and scaling skills to help take their businesses to the next level.

Nine entrepreneurs who completed LTEI this summer were invited to participate in the November Pitch Competition to compete for a total of

$20,000 in business funding. The nine businesses that participated in the competition included Fruits Coffee Company, Flippin Good LLC, 1st Step Healthcare Training, Do Not Grow Weary, Hurley's Coffee & Mercantile, KayLuxe & Co., The Life Shelf, LLC, Little Susie Café & Sweetshop and Diana Kim Hair Artist Inc. Each business owner showcased the skills they gained and how they plan to apply them to their businesses' continued growth.

**2026 Pitch Competition Winners**
The Lake Trust Foundation awarded a total of $20,000 in funding to four participants in support of their future business plans. A panel of judges selected the winners, with first place receiving a grand prize of $10,000, second place receiving $5,000 and third place receiving $3,500. Additionally, the top presentation selected by the public audience received a $1,500 Audience Choice Award.

The winning class of the November 2026 Lake Trust Foundation Entrepreneur Pitch Competition includes:

- **First Place:** 1st Step Healthcare Training of Detroit, a state-approved Detroit school offering accelerated, affordable CNA, phlebotomy and EKG technician programs.
- **Second Place:** Little Susie Café & Sweetshop of Detroit, a neighborhood cafe plans to offer sandwiches, paninis, soups, salads, grain bowls, ready-made meals, desserts and more, along with catering, memberships and private events
- **Third Place:** Fruits Coffee Company of Detroit, a community-centered coffee brand serving 100% Arabica beans, handcrafted drinks and inventive coffee products.
- **Audience Choice**: Hurley's Coffee & Mercantile of Detroit, a local destination where coffee, tea and light food meet mushroom education, grow bags, garden supplies and a community gathering space.

The Lake Trust Foundation held its inaugural Entrepreneur Pitch Competition in March 2026, awarding Whole Mama Michigan of Brighton the grand prize of $5,000. Other prize winners included DA BOMB TACO of Detroit, C'Mon Betty of Ann Arbor and Reed Walker Design Collective of South Lyon. For more information, visit laketrust.org/lake-trust-entrepreneurship-institute.

###

**About Lake Trust Foundation**
The Lake Trust Foundation, an independent entity of Lake Trust, is a Michigan-based 501(c)(3) organization established in 2012 to help build and sustain stronger communities. Through generous support from donors, The Lake Trust Foundation awards various grants, donations and scholarships to underserved

Michiganders and community organizations each year—making a life-changing impact for those in need. To learn more, visit Lake Trust at www.laketrust.org/foundation.