



Innovate Illinois winners strike right note

\$40K AWARD | For young companies presenting business plans, it pays to have perfect pitch

November 20, 2008

BY BRAD SPIRRISON

Two Chicago companies were named the state's most innovative entrepreneurs: Harrison Custom Harmonicas and CallPod Inc.

The Innovate Illinois entrepreneurial winners announced Wednesday each received \$40,000 in cash from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

Brad Harrison's Harrison Custom Harmonicas shared top honors with CallPod Inc. in the Innovate Illinois entrepreneurial competition. Harrison Custom Harmonicas makes unique instruments (inset).

Founded in 1998, Harrison Custom Harmonicas incorporates patent-pending technology and designs into its instruments to allow for more efficient production and easier playability. The company has also built custom harmonicas for several musicians including Bono, Bruce Willis, Mick Jagger and Sugar Blue.

"Even though my company makes harmonicas and I was up against tough competition in the medical field, people could relate to what I was doing," said founder Brad Harrison, 38.

CallPod Inc. develops and owns patents for several wireless audio conferencing technologies. The company's products include a Bluetooth headset that enables users to be 250 feet away from their cell phones and a charger that can power six devices at one time.

Two runners-up each received \$10,000 in cash prizes: Champaign-based Kim Laboratories develops diagnostic detection systems for food-borne pathogens including salmonella, and E. coli. Clipius Technologies, which is based in Downstate Murphysboro, creates antimicrobial coatings for spinal implants and instrumentation.

A total of 32 companies were selected from the state's 19 Entrepreneurship Centers to compete in Innovate Illinois, which is also administered by the Chicagoland Entrepreneurial Center. The companies were divided into two tracks for early and later stage businesses. Each participating company needed to have generated less than \$5 million in revenue over the last fiscal year and be headquartered in Illinois.

In all, more than 130 companies applied for the program. Twelve companies were invited to present 10-minute business presentations during Tuesday's finals. The other Chicago area finalists were Sanogene Therapeutics Inc., Vesseltek BioMedical, and Salare Security.

Brad Spirrison is a Chicago free-lance writer and president of MidwestBusiness.com.