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**AMPLIFY Clearwater unveils IGNITE Entrepreneurship Center
powered by Duke Energy, awards \$30,000 to two small businesses
at its Spring 2024 business incubator program's 'Pitch Night'**

CLEARWATER, FL – Less than a year after launching the first business incubator program focused on Tourism Innovation in the State of Florida, AMPLIFY Clearwater unveiled the name and naming rights sponsor of its full-service entrepreneurship center yesterday, June 25th, at its Spring cohort's Pitch Night event. IGNITE Entrepreneurship Center, powered by Duke Energy, will house the program among a growing list of additional resources and upcoming initiatives.

“Small and locally owned businesses and entrepreneurs contribute to the vitality of our communities,” said Melissa Seixas, Duke Energy Florida state president. “At Duke Energy, we understand the importance of collaboration, innovation and investments to support the economic growth of our communities. It is a privilege to work alongside AMPLIFY Clearwater to power Florida’s growing population of small businesses that are cultivating a vibrant and sustainable tourism ecosystem.”

The event, which was held at the Murray Theatre at Ruth Eckerd Hall, saw the program participants present their business and detail their experience through the 10-week cohort. Two local small businesses were awarded \$20,000 and \$10,000 respectively. Judges Ben Friedman, Duke Energy Florida Economic Development Specialist, Yolanda Goodloe, Procurement Specialist for the Florida Procurement Technical Assistance Center at Pinellas County Economic Development, and Dr. Emmanuel Hernandez-Agosto, Dean of the College of Business at St. Petersburg College, awarded [WakeSurf Tampa](#) the first place, and [Street Level One](#) the second place.

Officially launched in October of 2023 with the first cohort of its tourism incubator program, IGNITE Center will continue to be a resource for entrepreneurs in the early stages of business creation and growth. Located inside AMPLIFY Clearwater headquarters at 1346 S. Fort Harrison Avenue in Clearwater, IGNITE plans to serve some of the 100,000+ small businesses in the Tampa Bay region to drive sustainability, improve resilience, and attract new economic development opportunities. Duke Energy committed to supporting this effort for 3 years.

“In our role as a chamber of commerce, we typically serve businesses who have ‘hung their first shingle’,” shared Amanda Payne, President/CEO of AMPLIFY Clearwater. “Under IGNITE, we look forward to providing services to the entrepreneurs who are in a critical stage of growth—when almost 50% of new ventures fail—whether they are already part of our community or looking for a promising place to land.”

Payne and AMPLIFY Clearwater’s Chief of Staff Joe Lugo hosted the Pitch Night ceremony and provided insights on the IGNITE Entrepreneurship Center. For details and developing programming information, visit www.amplifyclearwater.com/ignite

About AMPLIFY Clearwater

The mission of AMPLIFY Clearwater is to promote and meet the needs of businesses, tourism, and industry and to provide leadership for the advancement of economic vitality and equality for the community of the North Pinellas Region.

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