

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 24, 2019

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Bee Joyful Shop wins Catalyst University's annual Makers' Mart competition

Kalamazoo, MI – Bee Joyful Shop earned the coveted Makers' Mart title at Catalyst University, a daylong leadership event annually hosted by the regional economic development organization Southwest Michigan First on June 20, 2019 at Wings Event Center in Kalamazoo. Bee Joyful Shop was selected by the 2,500 event attendees from a pool of four finalists—all regional product makers based in Southwest Michigan.

Bee Joyful Shop (www.beejoyfulshop.com), located in Kalamazoo's Park Trades Center, is a boutique that offers a handmade, reusable, antimicrobial and biodegradable alternative to single-use plastics commonly used for food storage. Its cotton wraps are made of 100% cotton, infused with sustainably sourced beeswax, pine resin and jojoba oil.

As the winner of the 2019 Makers' Mart competition, Bee Joyful Shop was recognized with a \$2,500 cash prize awarded by Steve Newell, Associate Dean of Operations and Graduate Programs and Professor of Marketing at Western Michigan University's Haworth College of Business. Additionally, Bee Joyful Shop will receive MiSpringboard legal services courtesy of Varnum LLP and marketing support from Newhall Klein.

The company's founder, Jessica VanderVere, plans to use her earnings to invest in equipment that would speed up the manufacturing process. VanderVere says, "As of now, Bee Joyful Shop uses large open pans of wax to coat the wraps and cuts every single wrap with office scissors. Winning the competition means streamlined production and an even greater global impact."

The fifth annual Makers' Mart competition accepted applications from across Southwest Michigan and a selection committee chose four finalists for the competition. At Catalyst University, pre-taped company video stories were shown of each finalist. Finalists also managed onsite pop-up shops from which they sold their products. In addition to Bee Joyful Shop, the other finalists were Anii Skincare, Great Scott Ice Cream and PHYSIC Kombucha.

“Southwest Michigan First realizes the importance of businesses of all sizes to the regional economy. The vitality of our small businesses is oftentimes one of the best indicators of how we are performing in relation to our global peers. The innovation, creativity and personal contribution of all of our finalists should be cheered and cheered loudly,” said Ron Kitchens, chief executive officer and senior partner of Southwest Michigan First. “Southwest Michigan First is proud to award Bee Joyful Shop as the winner of the 2019 Makers’ Mart competition.”

“Michigan is a fertile ground [for small business],” said Dr. Satish Deshpande, Dean of the Haworth College of Business. “Innovation, creativity, and work ethic pour [out of this area].” Of the college’s support of Makers’ Mart, Deshpande said, “The Haworth College of Business and Southwest Michigan First are natural allies in creating jobs in Southwest Michigan. We’re [both] committed to supporting entrepreneurs within the community as they reach milestones in their business journeys. That’s what Makers’ Mart is all about.”

About Southwest Michigan First

Founded in 1999 on the principle that the most powerful force for change is a job, Southwest Michigan First is an organization of privately funded economic development advisors who act as the catalyst for economic growth in Southwest Michigan. For more information about Southwest Michigan First, please visit us at www.southwestmichiganfirst.com, or call 269.553.9588.



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