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Mountain BizWorks and Outdoor Gear Builders Announce First-Ever Waypoint Accelerator Cohort

10 startups selected for the East Coast's first outdoor business accelerator

Asheville, NC, (September 17, 2019) – Mountain BizWorks and Outdoor Gear Builders of WNC today announced the 10 companies participating in the inaugural Waypoint Accelerator program, which launches tomorrow and continues through March 2020. Waypoint Accelerator provides promising new outdoor startups with focused support and resources to help them start, grow and thrive.

“As the first program of its kind in the eastern U.S., this Waypoint cohort represents a milestone for our region’s outdoor industry,” said Gary Heisey, Mountain BizWorks board chair. “The cohort is packed with innovative companies and we look forward to helping them realize their potential.”

Designed for early-stage, outdoor-focused companies, Waypoint combines an intensive startup curriculum with tailored mentorship from more than 40 seasoned advisors, drawing on the region’s thriving outdoor industry network. Waypoint also features strong access-to-capital connections but, unlike some other accelerator programs, doesn't require participants to give up equity or take investment to participate.

The Waypoint companies cohort has also been invited to participate in the Outdoor Biz Pitch competition and reception, hosted by the Small Business and Development Center (SBTDC) and partnering organizations. They’ll be competing for monetary prizes to grow their businesses at this public event on **October 9, 2019**, from **5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.** at **New Belgium Brewery in Asheville.**

“This is an exciting time for the outdoor industry in Western North Carolina, and we want to raise awareness about the outdoor brands and opportunities in the area,” said Amy Allison, marketing manager for Eagles Nest Outfitters and a co-founder of the Outdoor Gear Builders of WNC. “The Outdoor Biz Pitch competition is a great opportunity for our brands and the community to unite.”

While the Outdoor Biz Pitch kicks off the 2019 Outdoor Economy Conference, beginning the next day, October 10, at the Crowne Plaza, the event is open to the public and will include a crowd vote. Plus, some of the outdoor industry's most recognized and respected experts will be among the judging panel.

Tickets for the Outdoor Biz Pitch can be purchased individually for \$15. To purchase conference passes and pitch competition tickets, visit outdooreconomy.org.

The 10 companies making up the first Waypoint Cohort – half of which are rural-based – were selected from a highly competitive pool of 26 applications. They include:

- **Big Weekend**
Big Weekend is a recreation and leisure brand featuring the gear you need to max out your next “Big Weekend” with style and ease.
- **Blue Ridge Hiking Company** (blueridgehikingco.com)
Blue Ridge Hiking Company is Western North Carolina's premier guiding service for day hikes and backpacking trips, which operates a retail shop and “The Trail-er” – an Appalachian Trail bunkhouse.
- **Blyss Running** (blyssrunning.com)
Blyss Running is a woman-owned small business designing flattering and functional running apparel for women that inspires their empowerment and joy.
- **Campa** (campa.link)
Campa provides a searchable, filterable, comprehensive list of camps and extracurricular programs with streamlined “one form” registration and payment systems – helping you get your child into the right camp at the right time.
- **Fifth Element Camping** (fifthelementcamping.com)
Fifth Element Camping makes a modular micro camper system for the Honda Element that can be installed or removed in minutes – turning your Element into a home on the road whenever you want it.
- **OGRE** (ogreoutdoors.com)
Ogre builds truck organization solutions for fly fishermen, mountain bikers, kayakers, surfers, snowboarders and other outdoor enthusiasts to maximize their time outdoors

instead of preparing for it.

- **Rent This Rod LLC** (rentthisrod.com)
Rent This Rod is an online fly-fishing company that rents high-end fly rods and ships them anywhere in the continental United States.
- **Rockgeist - Bikepack USA** (rockgeist.com)
Rockgeist specializes in custom bikepacking gear tailored to fit the exact shape of your bike with features that you choose.
- **Shira Forge** (shiraforge.com)
Shira Forge produces heirloom-quality axes and knives the way they have been made for generations – forged in the fire and made to be used whether on the trail, in camp or at the cabin.
- **The Tarpestry Co., LLC** (tarpestry.com)
The Tarpestry is a soft and durable weather-resistant outdoor blanket and tarp that puts a layer between you and nature, with style.

Waypoint Accelerator is a strategic initiative of the Growing Outdoors Partnership, a collaborative of public and private sector organizations working to advance WNC outdoor industry and related economic opportunities. The effort is supported in part by seed funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission.

More information about the Waypoint Accelerator program is available at waypointaccelerator.com.

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Mountain BizWorks

Mountain BizWorks is a U.S. Treasury certified non-profit Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) that provides tailored small business lending and peer-learning programs to help grow great businesses and expand economic opportunities in Western North Carolina. For more information, visit mountainbizworks.org.

The Outdoor Gear Builders

The Outdoor Gear Builders of WNC is a coalition of Western North Carolina-based outdoor companies collaborating to share talents, encourage new ideas and inspire each other. The member brands are dedicated to creating exceptional outdoor gear with a focus on responsible manufacturing, cutting edge innovation and economic growth in the region. For more information, visit outdoorgearbuilders.com.