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5 food startups to compete in pitch contest

Winner will get \$10K, marketing connections

By **Susan Dunne**

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Five Connecticut startup entrepreneurs who make cocoa, hot sauce, cornmeal breading, cookies and plant-based meals will compete on Nov. 10 in New Haven for the chance to move up to the next level with their products.

The winner of CT Food Launchpad's Entrepreneur Innovation Awards will be awarded \$10,000 and be able to connect with people in the food marketing world to expand their product lines and do whatever else it takes to push forward their food dreams.

"There are a ton of support programs that help brands figure out their logo, their general product, their initial business strategy. The gap we realized existed in the system was helping folks graduate from farmers markets to the grocery aisle," said Reed Immer, a spokesman for Chabaso.

Chabaso, the New Haven-based bread company, and Atticus, the bookstore-cafe in New Haven where Chabaso was born, created CT Launchpad. It will present the event with CTNext and the Yale Center for

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the Business and Environment.

It will be held at Kroon Hall, 195 Prospect St, New Haven, on Nov. 10 from 5 to 8 p.m. Admission is free. The public is welcome. Register at bit.ly/foodeia2022.

"These are five high-potential food brands," Immer said. "But it's more than just a foot in the door. We hope to turn this into a networking meetup for the entire food entrepreneurship ecosystem."

Second-place winner will win \$8,000, \$5,000 for third place and \$2,000 for audience choice. The judges will be Jordan Lue of CT Innovations, Rache Brand of Star Strong Capital and John Lawson of Whole Foods.

Marla Felton and Lauren Berger (Greenwich)

Marla Felton and Laura Berger, friends for 20 years, saw family members struggling with food sensitivities, dietary restrictions and health issues. "What if we develop a cookie everyone in the family can eat?" Berger said.

Real Cookies, their brand, is cookies with "all real ingredients from the earth. There is a short ingredient list and you can pronounce them all. No gluten, no corn, soy, dairy, eggs, artificial sweeteners," she said.

The flavors created now are chocolate chip, peanut butter chocolate chip and lemon-blueberry. The single-serve packages are currently sold in CVS stores, Fresh Direct, airports, convenience stores and various independent retailers. The women plan to soon introduce a shareable pouch of cookies.

Their next step in the evolution of Real Cookies is developing new flavors, support promotional efforts in stores and work toward zero waste in their packaging. realcookiesco.com.

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