

Group That Converts Cooking Oil to Fuel Wins Top Prize

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A local group that turns grease into green ? green fuel, green jobs and green cash ? earned first place and the top prize of \$5,000 at PitchNOLA 2010. The event, an elevator pitch competition for social entrepreneurship ventures, took place on Wednesday (Nov. 17) in the Freeman Auditorium at the Woldenberg Art Center on the Tulane uptown campus.



Hamilton Simons-Jones, left, of Gulfsouth Youth Biodiesel Project, winner of PitchNOLA 2010's \$5,000 prize, shakes hands with Joel Tilton, right, the audience favorite representing New Orleans Panthers FC. Chris Reade, emcee for the event, is in the center. (Photo by Erica Stavis)

The Gulfsouth Youth Biodiesel Project trains inner-city youths to convert used cooking oil into clean-burning biodiesel fuel, providing them with valuable green economy job skills. Restaurants earn a tax credit for donating used oil, and the group generates sustaining revenues by selling the biodiesel it makes to fleets and fuel distributors.

“They're reaching an audience that can really use the help, they have a sustainable plan and they're building on things that are already in the market,” says John Elstrott, executive director of the Freeman School's [Levy-Rosenblum Institute for Entrepreneurship](#) and one of this year's judges. “It was a nice program, and we wanted to give them help.”

Hamilton Simons-Jones, a 2001 Tulane graduate and chief development officer at Operation Reach, which runs the Gulfsouth Youth Biodiesel Project, says that while the cash prize will help the group scale up its training program, one of the biggest benefits of the competition was networking with other social entrepreneurs.

“There were a couple of people who were finalists that I made sure to get cards from,” Simons-Jones says. “We depend on community support and understanding of our work, so to have such a diverse audience like this is awesome.”

In addition to Gulfsouth Youth Biodiesel Project, New Orleans Panthers FC, which operates a soccer club for Central City youths funded in part by a community garden that supplies produce to local restaurants, won a prize of \$500 for being voted as best pitch by audience members.

PitchNOLA was presented by Social Entrepreneurs of New Orleans, Social Entrepreneurship Initiatives at Tulane, the Tulane Entrepreneurs Association, the A. B. Freeman School of Business and the Young Leadership Council.

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