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News Release

City of Atlanta Women's Entrepreneurship Initiative Holds Local Competition for the 2017 InnovateHer National Women's Business Challenge

ATLANTA – The City of Atlanta today announced that the Women's Entrepreneurship Initiative (WEI) was selected to serve as the local host of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) 2017 InnovateHer: Innovating for Women Business Challenge. InnovateHer is a national business competition seeking entrepreneurs who are creating products or services that have a measurable impact on women and their families, fills a need in the marketplace and has potential for commercialization. This is the third consecutive year that WEI has served as a local host for this national competition.

"The City of Atlanta Women's Entrepreneur Initiative is honored to host this innovative business challenge geared specifically to women," said Theia Smith, Founding Executive Director, WEI. "It is important to understand the value of empowering our local entrepreneurs with opportunities to bring their products and services to market. We're proud of the caliber of talent we've seen in our Atlanta applicants and look forward to nominating one of them for the chance to compete on the national stage."

After a rigorous application process, WEI, as well as other host organizations and SBA Resource Partners around the country, identified five applicants with the most innovative and entrepreneurial business ideas to participate in the pitch competition held at WEI headquarters in Atlanta's historic Flatiron Building.

"The return of SBA's InnovateHER Business Challenge presented an exciting opportunity for some of our nation's foremost entrepreneurs and innovators," said Maria Contreras-Sweet, SBA Administrator. "Women represent half of the U.S. workforce and control 80 percent of the nation's purchasing power, but still make up less than five percent of venture capitalists."

The five local entrepreneurs selected to pitch their business idea at the WEI Business Pitch Challenge were: Justina Davis, Omodé; Jennifer Bluemling, Borrowed by Design; Asma Young, Hijabi Pop; Quynah Wingfield, Cool Moms Dance Too; and Courtney Harmon, The Bribe Bag.

Justina Davis was chosen to advance to the semi-final round and pitch her business, called Omodé. SBA will then select up to 10 finalists who will be invited to the national InnovateHER: Innovating for Women Business Challenge to be held this summer. The finalists will pitch their products and ideas to a panel of expert judges and compete for the top three awards along with \$70,000 in prize money provided to SBA for the InnovateHer competition through a gift from the Sara Blakely Foundation.

"Ms. Davis is incredibly deserving of the nomination win and we're proud to advance her to the next round of the InnovateHER competition. Omodé, which fills a void in the market and taps into a unique need of mothers and families, is exactly the type of business that best aligns with the goals of the competition," added Theia Smith.

About WEI

Launched in May 2016, the Women's Entrepreneurship Initiative operates as an incubator for 15 women business owners designed to foster and promote interaction and engagement with their likeminded counterparts. Through an ecosystem of educational resources, access to funding assistance and mentorship, the women will grow their businesses, over the course of 15 months, and then transition the business back into the City of Atlanta at the culmination of that period.

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