FirstOntario
CREDIT UNION

Small business owners can pitch to win and share $200,000 in prizes in this year's FirstOntario 1Awards competition

Applications are open until 11:59 p.m. on March 31

Hamilton, ON, March 2, 2026 – The FirstOntario 1Awards recognizes local entrepreneurs who are looking to step up their game. Business owners can apply for a chance to pitch, win and share $200,000 ($32,500 in cash and $167,500 in professional in-kind services) in prizes.

Eligible businesses have a homebase in Hamilton, Halton, Brant, Niagara Region or surrounding areas. They've been open for at least two years with less than 50 employees and they can impress the panel with their innovation, dedication, past achievements and commitment to their community.

"When you support small businesses, you are investing in your community's future and you have an immediate impact on their success," said Joanne Battaglia, Senior Vice President, Marketing, Communications and Community Partnerships. "FirstOntario and 1Awards partners have always rallied around our local entrepreneurs – it's critical that they are recognized and supported."

Chosen finalists (10) will move to the next round. They'll be invited to attend an interactive workshop hosted by The Thornton Group before pitching to the panel on May 7 at Hamilton Stadium. Winners will be revealed May 27 at a breakfast gala. Prizes are provided by 1Awards partners who are experts in law, accounting, marketing, entrepreneurial and digital services.

The FirstOntario 1Awards have invested more than $2.5 million into local businesses through cash and in-kind, professional services. Community partners include Agro Zaffiro LLP, Giant Shoe Creative, KPMG, Mohawk Centre for Entrepreneurship, Play, The Hamilton Spectator and Weever. Additional sponsors include The Thornton Group, Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce and Carmen's Group.

For full details and to apply online, visit 1Awards.ca

About FirstOntario Credit Union
FirstOntario is a full service cooperative financial institution, serving members for more than 85 years throughout the Golden Horseshoe, Niagara Region and Southwestern regions of Ontario. With $7.9 billion in assets under management, FirstOntario is one of Canada's largest credit unions. Everyone is welcome to be part of FirstOntario for financial services including daily transactions, mortgages, lines of credit, loans and investments. FirstOntario profits are invested into the communities we serve through support for entrepreneurs, competitive rates and charitable pursuits including our award-winning student nutrition program. Learn more about us at FirstOntario.com.

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