

The Front Line

Pitch perfect: 2025 1Awards small business winners revealed



It's 1Awards pitch day. Finalists trickle into Hamilton Stadium for their half-hour time slot, some with carts full of props, others with simply a laptop. Their logos are plastered on the jumbotron on the field and line the screens on the Club level. Despite what their nerves are telling them – it's time to pitch for a chance to win and share in \$200,000 in prizes (\$20,000 cash, \$180,000 professional in-kind services).

Each presenter stands in front of 11 judges, a small video crew and a handful of volunteers. It's time to shine. Mics are on, cameras are rolling and one-by-one, 10 small business owners pitch their hearts out.

Finalists are prepped two weeks before through an interactive workshop put on by The Thornton Group, and it's clear they've been practicing. Each one runs a successful small business that's been in operation for at least two years. They have a solid resume and big plans for the future. They are telling the judging panel how the FirstOntario 1Awards can help to elevate their business.

"Small businesses are the heart and soul of our communities

and we're happy to continue to support them. We hope this experience contributes to their ongoing success," said Joanne Battaglia, Senior Vice President, Marketing, Communications and Community Partnerships at FirstOntario Credit Union. "We're grateful to our partners for continuing to support local businesses throughout the 13 years of the 1Awards program."

At the end of the day, the judges agreed on five winners. Apothecary Kitchen, Electric Diner, ImaginAble Solutions, Main Stage Rehearsal Studios and Willard's Ice Cream came out on top. Each winner put on a powerful presentation that showcased current success, future goals and their commitment to community. Thanks to our partners who make it all possible: Agro Zaffiro LLP, KPMG, Play Advertising, Giant Shoe Creative Agency, The Hamilton Spectator, Mohawk College's Centre for Entrepreneurship and Weever.

We would also like to thank additional sponsors The Thornton Group, Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce and Carmen's Event Centre.

A note from Our Chair



I would like to start by thanking the board of directors for having the confidence in me to remain as your board chair for the year ahead. It's been a privilege to serve FirstOntario in this role and I look forward to continuing on this positive path of success and growth along with our membership. The results of this year's board election were revealed at our annual general meeting in April and I would like to welcome back Carey Smith, along with Ophelia Chang, Peter Scott and Audrey Wubbenhorst.

On behalf of the board, I offer my thanks to FirstOntario's senior management team, who are hard at work, strategizing and forecasting our plans for the future. As the credit union continues to prosper, we are constantly moving and evolving with the universal goal of always improving your banking experience, our impact on the community and the stability of our financial institution. Despite global economic challenges, we'll always find ways to get you the support you need.

This month we celebrate 86 years of serving our members – we take great pride in being a local option that provides the same financial services and convenience as our competitors, with a personal connection and commitment that is unmatched. Part of that commitment is extended to our small business communities, who may also be going through tough times.

I would like to congratulate this year's 1Awards winners – five ambitious business owners who won prizes to help get them to the next level. We are grateful to our partners for their dedication and collaboration to bring our pitch competition back each year – an investment we are truly proud of.

Thank you for your contributions to FirstOntario – for your business, your feedback, engagement and for the support you show for our communities. Enjoy the summer, and please feel free to connect any time through Chair@FirstOntario.com.

Steve Boucouvalas
Chair, Board of Directors

Kicking off the summer season with the Hamilton Tiger-Cats

Our partnership with the Hamilton Sports Group includes the Hamilton Tiger-Cats and gives us the opportunity to connect and support community organizations, employees and members in meaningful ways. We're proud to be a part of FirstOn the Field Flag Football, the FirstOntario BeFit program and game days at Hamilton Stadium in the FirstOntario Community Lounge.

This summer we'll have some special guests at the lounge with us: Neighbour to Neighbour Centre, Niagara College, Brant Food for Thought and Food for Life. Stop by, say hi and visit our photo booth for a keepsake. Find us behind section 118 and keep an eye on our social media channels for ticket giveaways! Oskee wee wee!



Upcoming holiday closures

*Saturday, August 2	Civic Holiday weekend
Monday, August 4	Civic Holiday
*Saturday, August 30	Labour Day weekend
Monday, September 1	Labour Day
*Tuesday, September 30	National Day for Truth and Reconciliation
*Saturday, October 11	Thanksgiving weekend
Monday, October 13	Thanksgiving

*Our Member Service Centre, Member Solutions Team and Personal Assisted Teller services will be available 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Online/mobile banking is available 24/7.





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*Terms and conditions apply.



Personal Assisted Teller services offers virtual banking experience

Enjoy a quick connection to a FirstOntario teller through live video. This exclusive service is available in branch vestibules with full banking services and extended hours. Just stop by, pick up the phone or tap the screen to get started.

Get more details at [FirstOntario.com/PAT](https://www.firstontario.com/PAT)

Choose the banking experience that suits your needs

FirstOntario's remote sales and service teams are made up of our Member Service Centre, Personal Assisted Tellers and Member Solutions Team. They are here to make banking easier, convenient and more accessible while ensuring a consistent, high-quality experience. Visit [FirstOntario.com/contact](https://www.firstontario.com/contact) for hours of operation.



Member Service Centre

The voices behind our 1-800 number, this team troubleshoots banking inquiries and completes various transactions including bill payments, investments, digital support and problem resolution. This hybrid group is based out of St. Catharines and specializes in identifying opportunities and providing personalized support with every conversation



Personal Assisted Tellers

This service is available in branch vestibules. Connect through live video with a FirstOntario teller – who is standing by in Stoney Creek – for transactions including deposits, withdrawals, bill payments and more. Get flexibility with a personal touch and a full-service experience outside of traditional branch hours.



Member Solutions Team

This group offers a full range of solutions, including loans, mortgages and lines of credit. Working out of Stoney Creek and St. Catharines, they help with applications and personalized advice by phone or through virtual appointments, connecting with members when it's convenient for them. Reach them through 1-800-616-8878 (option 2).



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