

# Competition offers \$25,000 for best business plan

By Max Dible West Hawaii Today [mdible@westhawaiitoday.com](mailto:mdible@westhawaiitoday.com)

KAILUA-KONA — The entrepreneurial spirit is as strong as it is varied on the Big Island, but resources to help small businesses get off the ground and create jobs in traditional and emerging industries isn't always readily available.

The latter of which, one group is working to change.

Now in its second year, the Hawaii Island Business Competition (HIplan) is focused on fostering opportunity and generating excitement around innovation on the state's largest island.

"HIplan is all about encouraging what we call an 'entrepreneurial ecosystem' here, one that promotes an entrepreneurial spirit across all of Hawaii Island – Kona to Kapoho, Kohala to Ka'u," said Kelly Moran, co-chair of the competition and a realtor, business owner and part-time teacher in the business college at the University of Hawaii at Hilo.

HIplan offers a \$25,000 prize for the best business plan presented at the competition to help start or grow an existing small business. It's a joint venture supported by UH-Hilo and the Hawaii Island Chamber of Commerce. Held in Hilo last year, the second installment of HIplan will convene at the Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawaii Authority this fall.

HIplan's other co-chair, Jim Wyban, operated a business at NELHA for 20 years before selling it and joining Moran on the board of advisers to UH-Hilo's college of business. Wyban said the idea for the competition came up after he noticed an oversight in the college's strategic plan – no mention of entrepreneurship or any such training.

“I thought a business plan competition would be a way of stimulating the entrepreneurial ecosystem on Hawaii Island. In terms of an ecosystem, there’s kind of like nowhere to go,” said Wyban. “In terms of the small business climate, there’s a lot of opportunity, the economy is booming, but people don’t really know where to turn. That’s what we’re trying to create.”

Wyban said he was blown away by the range of ideas he encountered during last year’s inaugural competition.

“The diversity was really sensational,” he said. “Almost as diverse as you can imagine.”

Everything from an ulu cooperative to a manufacturer of robot kits to a high-end kitchenware retailer offered pitches. The winner of HIplan 2016 was Ono Queens LLC, a family-owned business run by Chris and Wendy Klepps in Puna that raises queen bees for sale across the world.

Any local business is eligible to apply, including all of the 49 entrants from last year, save for Ono Queens. The deadline for initial submissions of business plans is Sept. 10. More information on how to submit can be found at [www.hiplan.biz](http://www.hiplan.biz).

After plans are reviewed, those selected to move on to round two will present 15-minute presentations to judges at NELHA on Oct. 14. From that pool, a group of finalists will be selected. The competition’s last round will consist of two-minute elevator pitches to judges at NELHA on Nov. 4.

Two launch events, one in Hilo and one at Hawaii Community College – Palamanui, will precede the September submission date.

The specific date for the launch event in Kona is yet to be announced, but Wyban said restauranteur Sam Choy has agreed to serve as the featured speaker and discuss his culinary entrepreneurship at the launch scheduled for Palamanui.

HIplan will add a special category this year for the best business plan cultivated by students at UH-Hilo and Hawaii Community College.

Wyban said that while the \$25,000 prize has already been secured through donations, fundraising continues as HIplan hopes this year to offer a \$10,000 prize for second place and a \$5,000 for third place.

Those interested in donating can contact Wyban at (808) 938-2840. All winners sign a letter of commitment to spend prize money on starting or growing their businesses.