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24

CORTEX'S SQUARE ONE YEARBOOK

FUELING INNOVATION

A message from Ben



As we close the chapter on 2024, I want to take a moment to celebrate the incredible journey we've shared this year.

First, let's talk about our entrepreneurs. This year, Cortex's Square One programs supported an incredible group of innovators who took bold steps to bring their ideas to life. From launching new ventures to scaling existing businesses that create jobs and shape industries, their success is the heart of what we do. Their resilience, creativity, and determination inspire us every day.

Second, our partnerships have been pivotal. Collaborations with organizations, mentors, and leaders in entrepreneurship have amplified our ability to support entrepreneurs. These partnerships have provided resources, connections, and opportunities that are truly transformative. Together, we've built a network that not only uplifts individuals but strengthens the entire ecosystem.

Finally, the deep impact we've made on entrepreneurs. This year, we've seen firsthand how the right support at the right time can transform dreams into reality. These entrepreneurs are creating opportunities, driving innovation, and strengthening the fabric of our community in meaningful ways.

As we reflect on 2024, I want to express my deepest gratitude for your continued support and belief in Square One. None of this would be possible without you—our partners, supporters, and champions of change.

Thank you for being part of this journey.



Square One IGNITE



Cortex's Square One Ignite program helps entrepreneurs validate their business ideas and identify target markets, laying the foundation for a successful launch. Designed for those in the early stages of entrepreneurship, Ignite provides practical instruction for aspiring and current business owners, many of whom have not had access to formal entrepreneurship training.

Square One Ignite also connects participants to St. Louis' rich ecosystem of entrepreneurial resources. By raising awareness and encouraging engagement with entrepreneurship training, mentorship, professional networks, and more, the program acts as a launchpad for continued growth. Ignite equips entrepreneurs with the connections needed to thrive in their business journeys.



SQ1 IGNITE

Spring Cohort



22 Graduates

68% Women Entrepreneurs

72% Entrepreneurs of Color

Participants: A.J. Trujillo, Akani Ahdnahd, Alana Lerch, Alexander Parker, Brenda Sherrard, Carrie Harris, Chris Ocasio, Dorothy Guillen, Eve Maltzman, Fanny Anchiluri, Frederick Sherrard, Jasmine Thomas, Kamyar Jafari, Kimberly Fort, Korey Calloway, Lakisha McDonald, Lyndon McKay, Mary Ruppert-Stroescu, Micheala IntVeld-Sutherland, Michelle Borland, Ricardo Carey, and Tim Jedrek.

Summer Cohort



26 Graduates

73% Women Entrepreneurs

80% Entrepreneurs of Color

Participants: Angela Taylor, Anthony Norwood, Arvind Srinivasaraghavan, Bonnie Mann, Claudete Nogueira Viana, Constance Kennell, Detra Norwood, Elisha Newsome, Esmeralda Aharon, Flossie Njama, Katrina Watts, Keena McBride, Kerri Schwalb, Kita Quinn, LaParis Hawkins, LaQuoria Sharp, Luis Bautista, Patrick Gutierrez, Patrick Hunt, Sebastian Kyllonen, Shevah Pinkus, Tamara Landeiro, Thi Nguyen, Tiarra Adams, Tyanna Broadway, Tyra Cole, and Will Timm.



Square One BOOTCAMP

Cortex's Square One Bootcamp is an intensive, hands-on program designed to help entrepreneurs in the early stages refine their business strategies and strengthen their operational foundations. SQ1 Bootcamp dives into the intricacies of running a scalable and sustainable business, offering training in financial modeling, market positioning, and strategic planning. It's perfect for entrepreneurs ready to move beyond the idea phase or those looking to grow and optimize their existing businesses.

The program is structured into two parts. On Monday evenings, participants learn essential topics like marketing, budgeting, financial projections, and pitching from industry experts. On Tuesday evenings, participants meet with their dedicated industry mentors to discuss sector-specific challenges, insights, and strategies.

In 2024, SQ1 Bootcamp expanded to include support for service businesses, complementing its existing focus on IT, advanced manufacturing/consumer manufacturing, and the food industries. This expansion ensures the program addresses unique sector challenges while connecting entrepreneurs to St. Louis' thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem. Participants leave the program with a clear plan, practical tools, and the confidence to grow their business successfully.





SQ1 BOOTCAMP

Mentors



Marc Bowers
Advanced & Consumer
Manufacturing



Michael Kehoe
I.T.



Porscha Anderson
Service



Chef Bill Helige
Food





SQ1 BOOTCAMP

Advanced Manufacturing & Consumer Products Track



Arvind Srinivasaraghavan
ZAPS



Brandon Hunter
Origin of Greatness



Charity Snider
The Goodlife Candle Co.



Flossie Njama
Flossie's Turmeric Tea



Jeff Schwalb



Kerri Schwalb



Korey Calloway
Divine Terre



LaParis Hawkins
Tailored Pieces



Michelle Borland
Vital Strands



SQ1 BOOTCAMP

In Partnership With



Food Track



Alicia White
Chatty Chews



Angela Taylor
EAZ-Pastries



Detra Norwood
Delicious Delights



Dorothy Guillen
Bread & Bake



Faiza Muhambi
Faiza's Kitchen



Maria Pacheco
Amazing Arepa Bar



Shradha Challa
Rasa Chai



Tiarra Adams
Viva la Vegan



Vidalia Romero
Sabor Chapin



Service Track



Akani Ahdnahd
Secondchance Fashions



Alana Lerch
Change Raven



Bonnie Man
STL Coffee Fest



Cheresse Alcorn
Wellness Beyond the Chair



Jhony Geronimo
Paint by Geronimo's



Katrina Watts
Bigga Figga Unlimited



Kita Quinn
1k Digital Memories



Luis Bautista
Green & Happy
Lawn Services



Tyanna Broadway
Broadways on Broadway



SQ1 BOOTCAMP

IT TRACK



Brenda Ellis
iDeniti



Franklin Taylor
Sustain-A-Plate



Kamyar Jafari
iDeniti



Patrick Hunt
Trident Aquaculture

SQL Bootcamp Graduation

Each year, SQL Bootcamp concludes with a memorable graduation ceremony honoring our graduating entrepreneurs. Every participant is individually recognized for their achievements, and four standout entrepreneurs are selected to pitch their businesses, representing their respective tracks. This year, we were inspired by the compelling pitches from Jeff & Kerri Schwalb, Cheresse Alcorn, Franklin Taylor, and Shradha Challa.

It was a day of recognition, innovation, and community!





Match Savings Program

In 2024, we proudly launched the Matched Savings Program in collaboration with the St. Louis Community Credit Union. This innovative initiative empowers participants by providing a structured pathway to save for essential business investments. Through financial education, personalized goal setting, and ongoing support, participants commit to saving \$500 over six months, earning a remarkable five-to-one match—up to \$2,500.

This program opens doors to opportunities such as purchasing business supplies, building websites, attending trade shows, and more. By combining resources and expertise, Cortex's Square One and St. Louis Community Credit Union aim to foster financial stability, asset ownership, and economic empowerment within the St. Louis region.

Together, we are inspiring a future of self-sufficiency and success for entrepreneurs and dreamers alike.

12

Entrepreneurs
Currently Enrolled

\$6,000

Expected Collective
Savings

\$30,000

Expected Match



Venture Ready Missouri

In 2024, we proudly launched Venture-Ready Missouri, a transformative initiative powered by Cortex in partnership with Capital Innovators, with pilot funding from the Missouri Technology Corporation (MTC).

This two-part pilot program was designed to enhance the ability of Missouri-based entrepreneurs to secure venture capital and angel investments. Part One provided participants with an overview of various funding opportunities and detailed instruction on pitching to venture capital firms and understanding the fundraising process. Part Two invited select venture-scalable companies to engage in a two-month, hands-on segment focused on developing and refining verbal pitches and pitch materials, supplemented by one-on-one office hours to formulate viable fundraising strategies.

Venture-Ready Missouri exemplifies the profound impact of statewide collaboration in bolstering venture-scalable businesses. Key partners include SCORE, the Missouri Department of Agriculture, the Missouri Small Business Development Center (SBDC), KCSOURCELINK, and MOSOURCELINK. This collective effort not only empowers entrepreneurs to navigate the complex landscape of venture funding but also strengthens the entrepreneurial ecosystem throughout Missouri.

Venture Ready Missouri

Part 1

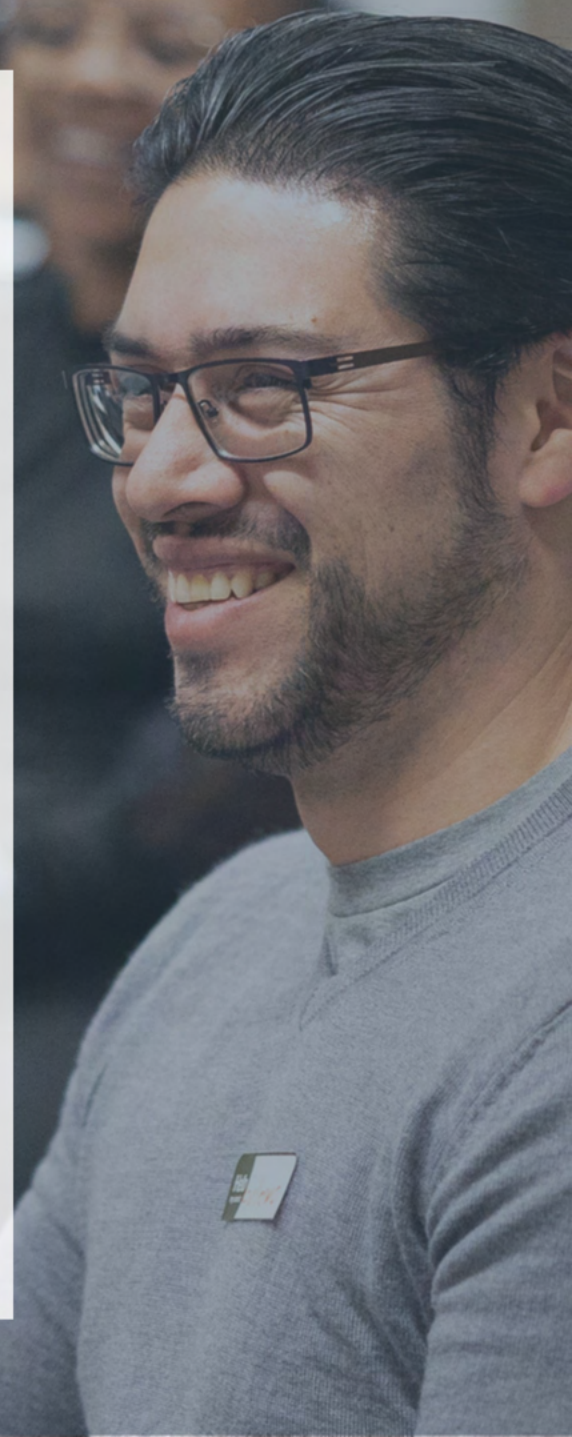
100+

Entrepreneurs
Enrolled

Part 2

8

Businesses
Selected



Build Biz Hackathon Weekend

Front and center in our work is a vision for empowering small businesses by bringing together the best creative minds in our region. The concept was simple: assemble a powerhouse team of service providers—like the Avengers—for small business owners. We envisioned helping these entrepreneurs with everything from accounting to marketing, websites, SEO, branding, HR, and operations.

We made it happen.

Over a weekend in August, we hacked 10 businesses, and we couldn't be more grateful for the partnerships that made it all possible.

A huge thank you to HeyDays, Small Business Empowerment Center, Girl Louie, VR Creative, Lighter Living, Church Productions, and the Creative Coach—the incredible team of service providers who have all contributed their expertise over this powerful weekend empowering and supporting each entrepreneur meet their business needs.

The work continues, and we couldn't be more excited for the small business founders that we worked with as we see them scale and grow!



Leslie Hernandez
Mama Pacha Spices
& Catering



Coach & MJ Tyson
Royally Baked



Trecia Davis
Equal Shares Parenting



Fanny Anchiluri
Capuli Bakery



Tierra Parks
HTP LLC



Melanie Rivas
Brows by Mel



Britteney Ofodile
Britt & Co



Kisha Lee
Propel Kitchens



Terri Campbell
Lush Libations



Tamara Landeiro
Havana's Cuisine

BUILD BIZ WEEKEND 2024

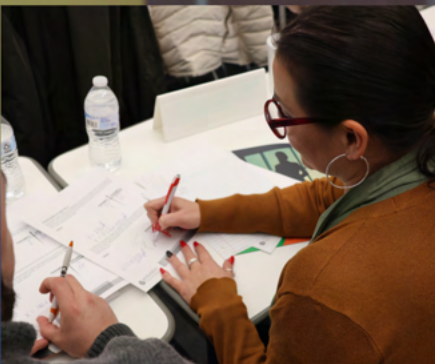


MEET THE FOUNDERS



Enrichment Programs

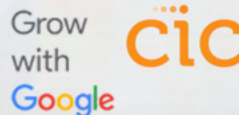
In 2024, we proudly provided additional support for entrepreneurs through our enrichment programs. These programs extend beyond our foundational Ignite and Bootcamp offerings, providing participants with expert speaker sessions, interactive workshops, legal consultations, and opportunities to present their business ideas to live audiences. This comprehensive approach ensures that entrepreneurs receive the holistic support necessary to thrive in today's competitive landscape.



95+ Programs Delivered

1,900+ Entrepreneurs Reached

30+ Community Partners





Graduate Spotlights

FUELING INNOVATION

Luis Bautista

Green & Happy Lawn Services

Green and Happy Lawn Service began as a passion project with a vision for quality and care. After years of hands-on experience in landscaping, Luis decided to take a leap of faith and launch his own business, confident that he could bring a fresh approach to managing lawn care jobs. The journey started with a single client, but Luis quickly discovered the power of momentum. One satisfied customer led to another, and before long, a domino effect of referrals and opportunities propelled Green and Happy Lawn Service forward. Luis is committed to growing the business while maintaining the personal touch and dedication that has earned the trust of his clients. His goal is to make every yard not just green, but a happy and thriving space for his customers to enjoy.



Tyanna Broadway

Broadway on Broadways

Broadways on Broadway Event Space and Cultural Center opened in December 2024 as a premier venue for all types of events in the heart of St. Louis. Whether you're planning a birthday party, retirement celebration, church anniversary, business retreat, or corporate event, Broadways on Broadway offers a stunning and versatile space tailored to your needs. With competitive rates and a dedicated team providing 5-star service, the venue is committed to making every event unforgettable.

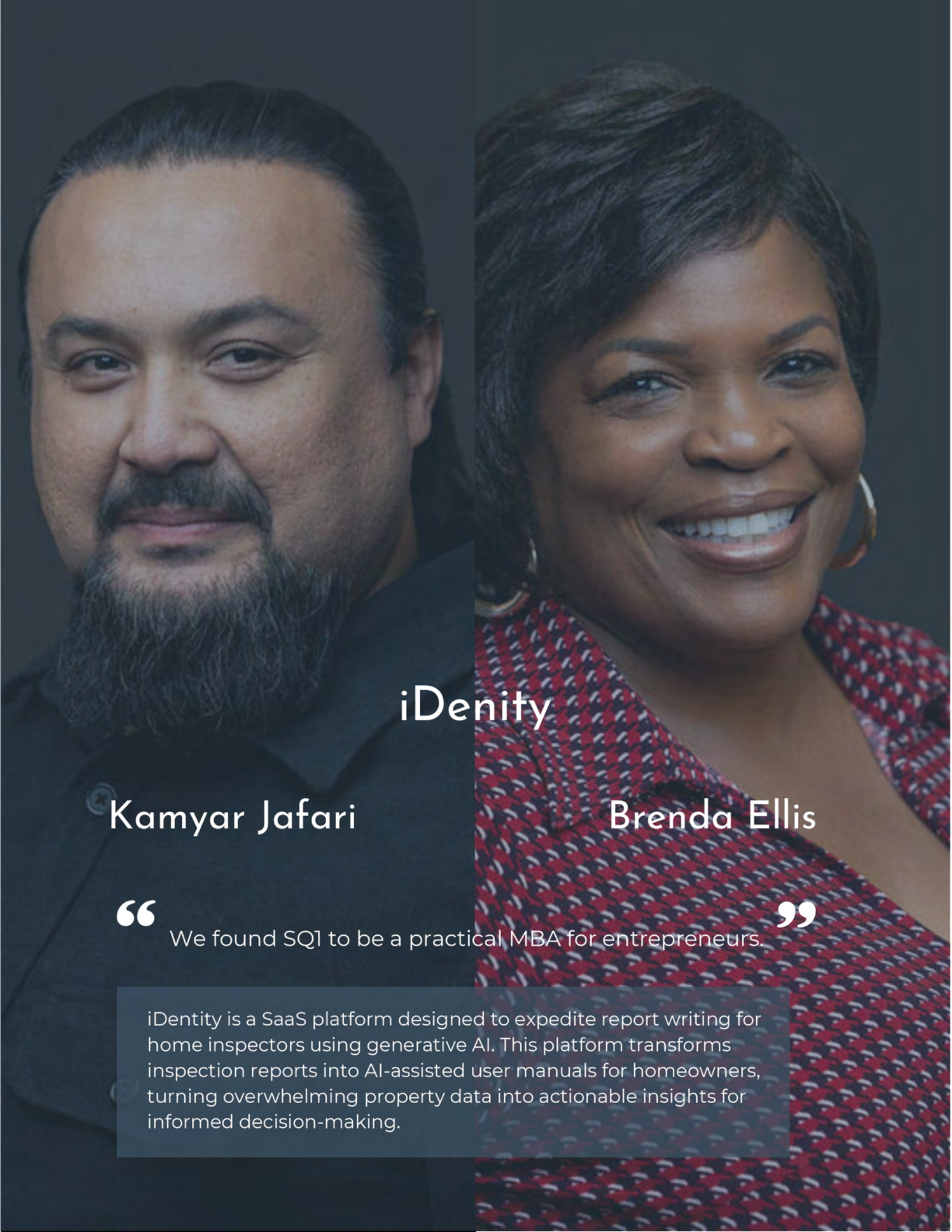
To learn more, visit
www.broadwaysonbroadway.com/

“

Hosting events has always been a passion of mine. What started in my home has now grown into something I can share with others on a regular basis.

”





iDentity

Kamyar Jafari

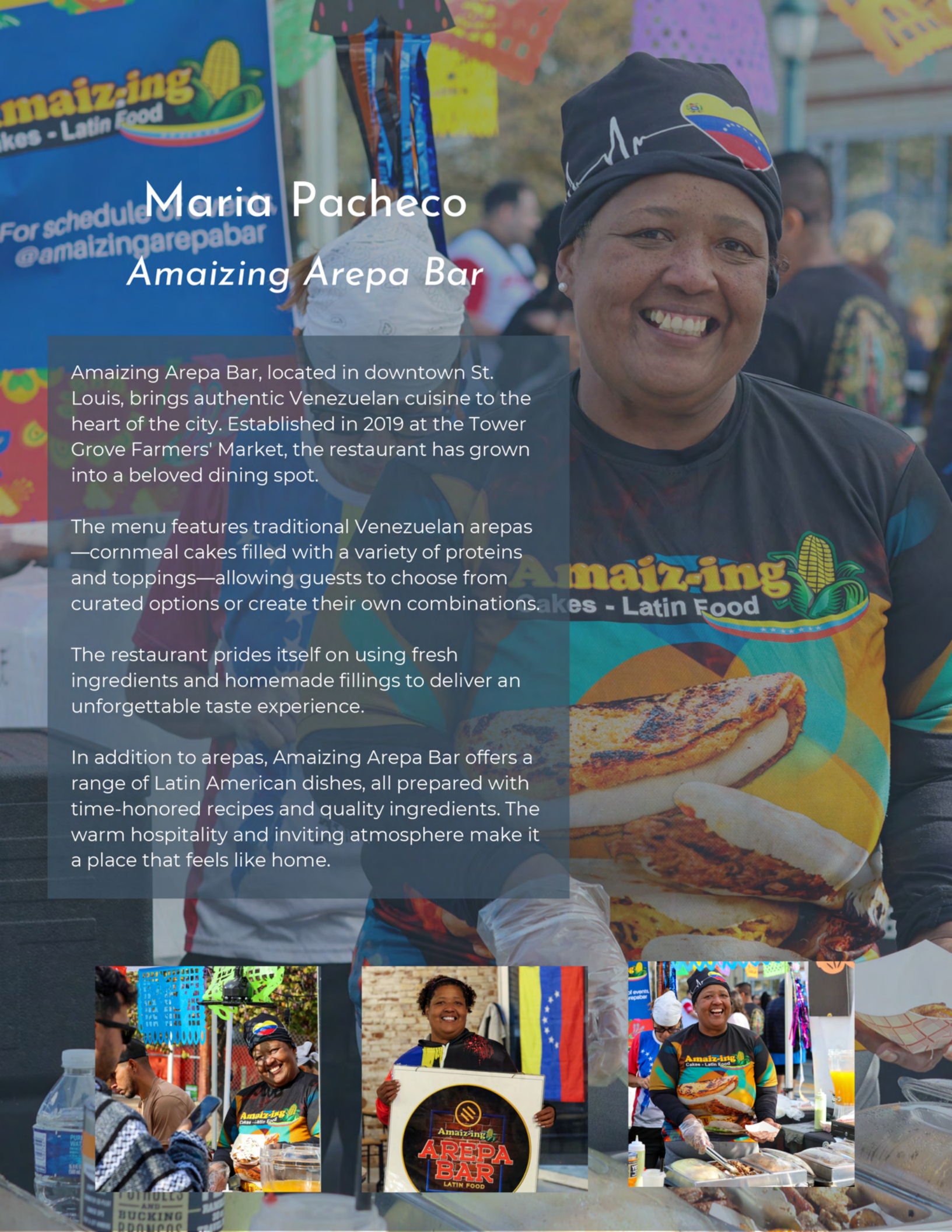
Brenda Ellis

“

We found SQL to be a practical MBA for entrepreneurs.

”

iDentity is a SaaS platform designed to expedite report writing for home inspectors using generative AI. This platform transforms inspection reports into AI-assisted user manuals for homeowners, turning overwhelming property data into actionable insights for informed decision-making.



Maria Pacheco

Amaizing Arepa Bar

Amaizing Arepa Bar, located in downtown St. Louis, brings authentic Venezuelan cuisine to the heart of the city. Established in 2019 at the Tower Grove Farmers' Market, the restaurant has grown into a beloved dining spot.

The menu features traditional Venezuelan arepas—cornmeal cakes filled with a variety of proteins and toppings—allowing guests to choose from curated options or create their own combinations.

The restaurant prides itself on using fresh ingredients and homemade fillings to deliver an unforgettable taste experience.

In addition to arepas, Amaizing Arepa Bar offers a range of Latin American dishes, all prepared with time-honored recipes and quality ingredients. The warm hospitality and inviting atmosphere make it a place that feels like home.





Brandon Hunter

Origin of Greatness

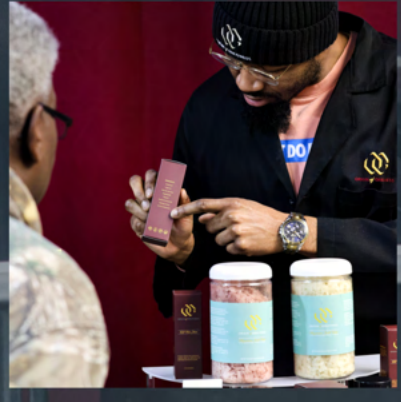
Origin of Greatness is a natural body care and hair growth company based in the East St. Louis. They specialize in creating preservative-free products without fillers, focusing on natural ingredients to promote healthy skin and hair. Their product line includes handcrafted body butters, scrubs, and soaps, as well as hair growth products designed to moisturize, soften, and strengthen hair.

Their hair care products utilize high-quality organic ingredients to support hair health. Free from harmful chemicals, these formulas are designed to nourish and stimulate natural growth for all hair types.

Their passion for wellness and empowerment is reflected in their mission to provide effective, all-natural solutions for both skin and hair.

To learn more, visit <https://theog.net/>

“ SQI elevated my game by being the environment for entrepreneurs to meet as a collective. It made this path less isolating & fueled motivation to continue on the journey! ”



Honoring Square One Legacy

Previously known as:



In 2024, Blanche Touhill and Marcia Mellitz were celebrated for their visionary leadership and enduring legacy as founders of the Center for Emerging Technologies (CET). Established in 1998, CET grew to become Missouri's largest and oldest Innovation Center, setting a benchmark for fostering entrepreneurship and innovation. Nationally recognized for its pivotal role, CET provided the infrastructure, resources, and support that early-stage, high-growth companies in fields such as information technology, biosciences, and consumer/manufactured products needed to thrive.

In 2022, CET officially dissolved and was absorbed by Cortex, marking the beginning of a new chapter in its legacy. Through this transition, the spirit of CET's mission lives on in **Cortex's Square One Programs**. This evolution ensures that the foundational work of Touhill and Mellitz continues to impact future generations of innovators.

The 2024 recognition of Touhill and Mellitz is a testament to their foresight and dedication to fostering a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem. Their contributions laid the groundwork for a thriving innovation community, leaving an indelible mark on Missouri's economic and technological landscape. Through the enduring influence of CET and its integration into Cortex's programs, their legacy continues to inspire and drive innovation.

SQUARE ONE
Cortex's Entrepreneur Training

SQUARE ONE
Cortex's Entrepreneur Training



CORTEX'S SQUARE ONE

FUELING INNOVATION