

[HOME](#) | [ACCELERATORS](#) | [ENTREPRENEURS TEE UP PITCHES DURING 3M OPEN](#)

From left to right: E.Bazz Beauty Supply founder Essence Shabazz; Code White founder Cartier Banks and COO David Hicks; and Silk Road Wellness co-founder and CEO Annie Qaiser **COURTESY OF THE GET DOWN TO BUSINESS ACCELERATOR**

ACCELERATORS

Entrepreneurs Tee Up Pitches During 3M Open

As part of the “Get Down to Business” accelerator, three startups got a chance to showcase their businesses at the annual 3M Open golf tournament.

By Josh Miller

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The [3M Open](#)’s “Golf That Matters” motto was on full display Monday afternoon at TPC Twin Cities golf course in Blaine as three local entrepreneurs pitched their businesses during the “[Get Down to Business](#)” accelerator. Selected out of 50 entrants, the three finalists will receive mentoring, resources, and a share of \$100,000 in unrestricted grants to help fuel growth of their companies.

Houston White, a local serial entrepreneur and community leader who founded [The Get Down Coffee Co.](#), was one of three expert panelists, alongside Wendy Nelson of the Carlson Family Foundation and businessman Mike Sweeney.



The winners will receive a share of a \$100,000 prize package.

This is the first time there's been a pitch competition during the 3M Open, which runs July 18-24 this year. An avid golfer himself, White said it made perfect sense to host the "Shark Tank"-style accelerator event at a golf tournament.

"There's a lot of money in the golf world, and golf is a great way to build relationships," White said. "It's important these entrepreneurs get exposed to this community of people."

The event was a joint effort by Fargo-based [Bell Bank](#), The Get Down Coffee Co., and the [Neighborhood Development Center](#). Bell Bank has worked with The Get Down Coffee in the past. Earlier this year, [the bank announced a multi-year financial services partnership with the coffee company](#).

Through initiatives like the Get Down to Business accelerator, the Neighborhood Development Center aims to empower residents of low-income, inner-city neighborhoods to utilize their entrepreneurial talent and energy to help revitalize their communities. The accelerator is one part of the center's goal to use entrepreneurship as a force for good.

"We want to help these entrepreneurs get to the next level," said Renay Dossman, president of the Neighborhood Development Center.

Attendees at the pitch competition included the NFL's Larry Fitzgerald, the Minnesota Lynx's Rebekkah Brunson, and Gopher head basketball coach Ben Johnson. Sports journalist Marney Gellner was the event's emcee.

Both White and the Neighborhood Development Center felt strongly that there should be dollars and mentorship tied to winning the competition. Finalist Essence Shabazz, founder of [E.Bazz Beauty Supply](#), was grateful for the grants, which were funded by Bell Bank and the 3M Open Fund, a nonprofit arm established in 2019. Her business, whose company slogan is "where beauty and community meet," is now looking to open a second storefront using the funding her business received from the accelerator.

"People of color don't always get these opportunities to grow our businesses," she said.

Annie Qaiser was awarded the top prize of \$40,000 to take the next step in expanding her business, [Silk Road Wellness](#). Her company bills itself as the first halal-certified wellness brand in the United States. Qaiser, who immigrated from Pakistan at a young age, hopes to spread awareness of halal principles through the product line's expansion.

“Events like these are important to create awareness about halal products,” she said.

The third finalist was [Code White](#), a cosmetic oral care company with a storefront location in Eden Prairie Center. Founder Cartier Banks and COO David Hicks retold the story of making their first investment to start the company.

“We started with \$500 and a dream,” Banks recanted. “Now, our goal is to become the No. 1 cosmetic oral care company in the world.”