



--PRESS RELEASE --

**\*\*Awards Program:** Tuesday, December 5, 2017, 1:00 p.m. Heritage Academy High School Columbus, Mississippi\*\*

**Heritage Academy is first in Mississippi to deliver real-world Internship and Entrepreneurship through Startup Genius platform.**

*High School Students from Heritage Academy participated in a Startup Genius Innovation Challenge where they developed their ideas with a new online platform with real-time help from the Gig-Economy (aka Freelancers) from all over the U.S.*

San Ramon, CA and Columbus, MS – Heritage Academy chose Startup Genius to provide an exciting opportunity to students through their innovative “GPS for your ideas” program. Heritage Academy is the very first to leverage this new technology and community as they encourage their students to think as an Entrepreneur with no limits. Within a few days time, students can take an idea and quickly connect with virtual industry advisors, potential recruiting college professors, and other experts to understand how to pursue their ideas further.

Heritage Academy, an independent college preparatory school in Columbus, Mississippi, recognizing the shifting need to better prepare their students for the future as Innovators and Entrepreneurs, licensed the Startup Genius platform through Pitsco Education, a global STEM solution provider to education market. To kick things off, students jumped into a Startup Genius Innovation Challenge consisting of a five-day ideation competition where students developed their ideas using Industry and University of Iowa provided STEM Innovator Roadmaps and real-time secure confidential advice and feedback from industry advisors, college professors and angel investors in preparation before crowd funding and/or hiring freelancers to develop their products or services all within Startup Genius.

In an effort to recruit and connect with the next generation of entrepreneurs, colleges and universities including Mississippi State University, Pittsburg State University, Mississippi University for Women and others provided virtual advisors and judges that selected the winners of the cash prize awards totaling \$1,000.

*“Students of Heritage Academy can align their interests and passions to solve problems within industry while preparing for innovation and gig-economies which by 2020 is expected to be 43% of the American workforce,” said Dan Benveniste, Founder/CEO Startup Genius Inc.*

*“As mainstream education struggles to connect ‘academic standards’ to the future Innovation and Gig Economies we jumped at the opportunity to offer Heritage students the advantage of being a Startup Genius themselves in preparation for this new world,” said Dr. Greg Carlyle, Headmaster, Heritage Academy, Columbus, Mississippi.*

*"Heritage Academy students have been given this wonderful opportunity to learn how to start and grow successful companies. It is my goal to create a culture where entrepreneurship is fostered. It is exciting to see the successes these students will experience, both now and in the future," said Dawn Dawkins-Instructor of Entrepreneurship and STEM Education, Heritage Academy.*

Following a two-stage judging process, the Top 10 submissions went on to compete for the cash prize awards and Heritage Academy is proud to announce the following Startup Genius Innovation Challenge winners:

- \$500 - First place goes to Team: Power Desk
  - Student Team: Noel Fisher, Gray Moore and Andrew Kelly
- \$300 - Second place goes to Team: Sericis Smooth
  - Student Team: Allison Yingst, Abby Amos, and Gigi Fields
- \$200 - Third places goes to Team: TextCheck
  - Student Team: Oliver Stratton, Jack Hiller, and Steele Altmyer

Our top three winning teams will be presented with their cash prize awards during a program at Heritage Academy, beginning at 1 p.m. on Tuesday, December 5, 2017. Scheduled to be on hand are Startup Genius Founder and CEO Dan Benveniste, Todd Smith of Smith Ventures, Tim Cannell of Pitsco Education, Chris Crawford of Applied Software, Leslie Flynn and Dawn Bowlus of The University of Iowa [STEM Innovator](#), Sydney Anselmi from Pittsburg State University, along with city and business leaders

from Columbus, Mississippi.

“Heritage Academy is an amazing place that is driving their students actively toward and ahead of the future market place. Heritage students are developing the skills that will not be outsourced or automated away.” - Todd Smith, Founder and President of [Smith Ventures](#)

Other key leaders present at the ceremony will include:

- Eric Hill, Director of Entrepreneurship from Mississippi State University Entrepreneurship Center
- Jeffrey Rupp, Director of Outreach from Mississippi State University Entrepreneurship Center
- Mayor Robert Smith, City of Columbus
- Lisa James, President of Columbus Lowndes Chamber of Commerce

Because student participation and engagement was so high, Heritage Academy is expanding the Startup Genius program to all Heritage Academy students currently in the STEM program. Heritage Academy is looking forward to partnering with local business and industry leaders to sponsor Internships and Startup Genius Challenges for spring 2018.

*“Mississippi State University is very encouraged to connect early with such innovative and aspiring students here at Heritage Academy,” said Eric Hill, Director, MSU Center for Entrepreneurship and Outreach.*

Startup Genius, headquartered in Pleasanton, CA, provides schools with a platform to develop their own innovation ecosystems enabling innovators to capture, develop, engage, and act on ideas with support from educators, industry, alumni, and investors.

“Our mission is to enable the 98% of the population that doesn’t have access to Innovation Ecosystems, starting first with education,” Benveniste said. “We believe firmly that, with a bit of guidance and a touch of community support, anyone can take deeply meaningful steps towards bringing their ideas to market, and we intend to help them along the way.”

#### **Highlights/Multimedia:**

- [Click to Tweet](#): The @Startup\_Genius Innovation Challenge
- **About Startup Genius Inc:** <http://www.startupgenius.org>

**Startup Genius** is a SaaS-based community on a mission to help 98% of the people around the world who don't have access to innovation ecosystems. We do this by enabling existing educational institutions with an innovation ecosystem to provide emerging entrepreneurs with an "all-access self-serve program so that anyone and everyone can learn and engage in the Innovation Economy.

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