

Lawrence student earns funding in The Pitch competition, keeps streak alive



Adona Lauriano '21

Story by Ed Berthiaume / Communications

Adona Lauriano '21 made it four for four for Lawrence University students finishing in the money in The Pitch, an annual intercollegiate entrepreneurial competition.

The government major from New York took third place, winning \$5,000 in cash and \$5,000 in in-kind services toward her start-up business venture. Lawrence students have now finished in the top three in all four years of The Pitch, a Shark Tank-styled competition that pits northeast Wisconsin college students against each other as they seek funding for a business start-up idea.

The competition, held in Oshkosh with Lauriano and some other competitors accessing it remotely, was originally scheduled in the spring but was moved to October because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lauriano jumped into the competition when she returned to campus in September.

Lauriano's business idea is called AX-ES (previously O.M. ID), a for-profit venture that would partner with municipalities in creating and distributing municipal photo identification cards for people who do not have a driver's license. It's all about access—or lack thereof—for people who are otherwise at a disadvantage when dealing with everything from City Hall to their neighborhood bank, she said.

AX-ES will develop a “white-label platform” to provide the software and hardware to implement and maintain a municipal ID program, Lauriano said.

“Eventually, we will control the cards’ production and distribution, but we will begin by partnering with each contracted municipality’s city ID agency,” she said. “AX-ES is seeking out contracted partnerships with city ID agencies in municipalities throughout the U.S. to ensure all individuals have access to beneficial and essential services despite socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. We are a for-profit social good organization, designed to promote community inclusion, financial access, and improved relationships between residents and local government.”

There are populations in every city that live without appropriate identification. Lauriano said AX-ES aims to bridge that divide.

“The problem is that many individuals who do not hold a driver’s license—homeless constituents, young people, and immigrants—do not have official identification that is accepted by police, banks, and some parks,” she said. “It is a human rights issue since IDs confer access to every aspect of public life.”

Lauriano, coached by Irene Strohbeen '78 and getting guidance from Gary Vaughan, Lawrence's coordinator of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Program,

made her pitch to the judges virtually. She weathered technical issues but came out undeterred.

“I tried my best to stress my passion and AX-ES’ potential to provide a super high impact,” she said.

Lauriano said 13 municipalities in the United States currently have municipal IDs. She wants to provide a service to make that much more widespread, with a focus on mid-sized cities that might not have the resources of a major metropolitan area.

“Thus, the real opportunity is to take AX-ES nationwide,” Lauriano said. “We would like to make it easier for cities to implement municipal IDs. Our potential market is the 639 U.S. cities with a population of 50,000 to 200,000. ... We want to cater to cities that might not have the human resources to develop their own municipal ID program without external assistance.”

Lawrence was joined in the fourth annual competition by students from St. Norbert College, the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, UW-Oshkosh, Fox Valley Technical College, Moraine Park Technical College, and Northeast Wisconsin Technical College. In all, 10 teams or individuals made pitches to the judges. Nicolet Bank was again the premier sponsor.

2017: Lawrence hockey players take first place in inaugural event.

2018: Team of international students takes first in second year.

2019: A strong second place in third annual competition.

Lawrence is the only school to have placed in the top three in each of the four years of the competition. Vaughan praised Lauriano for her preparedness as she navigated the difficulties of a remote pitch while most of the participants were in person.

“The fact that Lawrentians have placed in The Pitch in all four years the event has been held is a tribute to the total Lawrence experience, and it is indicative of the type of dedication and the work ethic our students exhibit in and out of the classroom,” he said. “Adona did great, and we are very proud of her accomplishment.”

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