



BUSINESS HOME

## BUSINESS Business accelerator selects first crop of entrepreneurs

By SHERRI BURI McDONALD  
The Register-Guard  
JULY 12, 2014

81 6 0 19 6  
Like Tweet +1 Share

### Today's Business stories

- Lane County home sales cool slightly in September
- A dizzying day for stocks
- HBO to offer stand-alone service
- Walmart cuts outlook, blames economy
- Google seeks to dull Apple's shine with its own lineup

More BUSINESS »

Starting Monday, the upper floor at the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce building will be filled with entrepreneurs — the inaugural class of the Eugene RAIN accelerator.

These founders of a half dozen companies will spend the next 12 weeks learning more about themselves, their companies, their markets and hopefully how to achieve success more quickly than if they were left on their own.

RAIN, the Regional Accelerator and Innovation Network, is a state-backed economic development initiative for the southern Willamette Valley. The Oregon Legislature has approved \$3.75 million for the project.

Its goal is to pool the resources of the University of Oregon and Oregon State University; the cities of Eugene, Springfield, Corvallis and Albany; and the business communities throughout Lane, Linn and Benton counties to help entrepreneurs turn new technologies into businesses and to speed the growth of promising companies to create well-paid jobs.

Six companies have confirmed their spots in the accelerator, said Joe Maruschak, chief start-up officer and director of the Eugene RAIN accelerator. He said he's waiting to hear back from two more companies.

The confirmed companies and their products include:

ADASA Inc., radio-frequency ID enabling retailers to more closely track their inventory and compete with online retailers.

Black Lodge Design Lab, environmental-friendly building materials using nanocellulose.

BT Biotech, over-the-counter home test for chlamydia.

Dune Sciences Inc., antibacterial textile coatings.

Manage My Co-op, web-based software to manage group buying processes.

SCAPE, a tool to help technical teams, such as scientists or software developers, collaborate.

Of the six, several have UO ties, including Black Lodge Design Lab, whose founder has an industrial and product design degree from the UO; Dune Sciences, a spinout of UO research; and Manage My Co-op, founded by Nathan and Kimmy Gustafson, a husband-and-wife UO alumni team.

The Gustafsons have poured themselves into their company since they founded it in November.

"We're at a point in our business where we've been full throttle," Kimmy Gustafson said. "It will be nice to take a step back and regroup and make a plan."

"I'm really looking forward to the mentorship and the community aspect of being with other entrepreneurs and being mentored by people like Joe (Maruschak), who have been there, and getting advice on what are the next steps to take with our company," she said.

Doug Yook, a SCAPE founder, said his company "hopes to gain advice on marketing and financing and gaps that we don't see ourselves."

Richard Geiger, co-founder of Dune Sciences, said he's looking forward to being mentored by people with different expertise than his own.

Geiger said he also welcomes the opportunity to network with other entrepreneurs.

Many of the companies "are doing the same kinds of things," he said. "They're writing plans to raise money. They're figuring out what are their strategies. Who's their bookkeeper? Who's their accountant? How do you bring on personnel and when?"

"Here's another dozen people who have been scouring the state and meeting people — investors and marketing talent — and here's an opportunity to pick their brains about who they've met and who we should be talking to."

### Selection process

The companies were selected by Maruschak, RAIN board member Dana Siebert; John Hull, executive director of the UO's Business Innovation Institute; and Patrick Jones, UO associate vice president for research and innovation, with advice from a few others, Maruschak said.

The group looked for companies that aligned with RAIN's goals of supporting knowledge-based companies in the "traded sector," companies that bring in money from outside the immediate area.

The selection team looked for companies with sound ideas and for founders who were open to being coached, Maruschak said.

The first month of the accelerator program will focus on the entrepreneurs themselves — "what makes them tick; what are their strengths and weaknesses?" he said.

"A lot of times entrepreneurs have gotten to this point by being pigheaded," Maruschak said. "That isn't going to work for them anymore. At this point we have to reprogram them. You have to start to trust people and build a bigger team of investors and advisers."

The entrepreneurs will be coached how to organize meetings, give presentations, read body language.

At the end of the first month, entrepreneurs will present their business idea to 30 mentors over two days and receive feedback and suggestions, Maruschak said.



The second month will focus on the product, understanding the market, the competition, how fast the company might grow and how much money it will need to sustain that growth.

The final month focuses on company formation, introducing corporate structures, fundraising strategies, and a case study of common mistakes, illustrated through the missteps of the fictitious company, [trainwreck.com](http://trainwreck.com), Maruschak said.

In the final week of the accelerator, companies will create a plan for the next year.

It might be "a business plan, a fundraising plan, a marketing plan, or a back-to-the-drawing board plan," Maruschak said.

Participants attend the accelerator 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, with some flexibility as they continue to run their companies.

RAIN also is making progress on the "innovation network" part of its mission.

Maruschak said 43 business people have committed to be mentors, from Shannon Oliver and Karen Bonner, co-founders of ketchup-maker Red Duck Foods, to Jeff Tunnell, who co-founded the Dynamix computer game studio in Eugene in 1984.

### **Huge milestone**

Getting the Eugene accelerator off the ground is a huge milestone, said Jim Coonan, who heads RAIN in Lane, Linn and Benton counties.

"It really shows the strong collaborative nature, in this case, between the UO and the city of Eugene," Coonan said.

"I love the fact that the accelerator is being housed at the chamber. It's off campus and I think that's an important message because the accelerator is meant to be an asset for the entire region."

*Follow Sherri on Twitter [@sburimcdonald](https://twitter.com/sburimcdonald). Email [sherri@registerguard.com](mailto:sherri@registerguard.com).*

---