

## BUSINESS

## Two Twin Cities businesses among winners in latest Meda Million Dollar Challenge

The top prize of \$350,000 went to a Virginia-based maker of desserts and sweets.

By Neal St. Anthony (<https://www.startribune.com/neal-st-anthony/6370535/>) Star Tribune |

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Two Twin Cities companies, HercLeon and Seraph 7 Studios, were among the five winners that divided the \$1.2 million prize in this year's Meda Million Dollar Challenge, the nation's largest business competition for minority-owned businesses.

The biggest prize of \$350,000 went to Bon AppeSweet, a Virginia-based maker of desserts sold online and in stores.

The Metropolitan Economic Development Association, or Meda, a Minneapolis nonprofit that helps minority entrepreneurs, awarded the prizes Tuesday night, climaxing a contest that began earlier this summer.

Hercleon, a maker of self-cleaning sheets and shirts for men, and Seraph 7, a video game developer, each received \$200,000 in the contest that attracted more than 200 entrants.

"The innovation and dedication from these entrepreneurs leaves me hopeful for the impact they will have on the economy and their community," said Alfredo Martel, chief executive of Meda.

During a humorous presentation to Twin Cities-area investors, commercial bankers and others, Hercleon founder Wenceslaus "Wen" Muenyi, said he is projecting \$700,000 in sales this year. He said the company is trying to raise about \$500,000 in working capital to build inventory and push sales to the next level.

The firm's "HercFiber" is made with at least two components, including a metal such as copper, silver, or zinc infused in a material like cotton, recycled polyester or bamboo, and a core fabric such as "bamboo infused with zinc phase changing material, and collagen peptides."



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Angela Dawson, co-founder and CEO of 40 Acre Cooperative, and Wenceslaus "Wen" Muenyi of Hercleon America, were finalists in

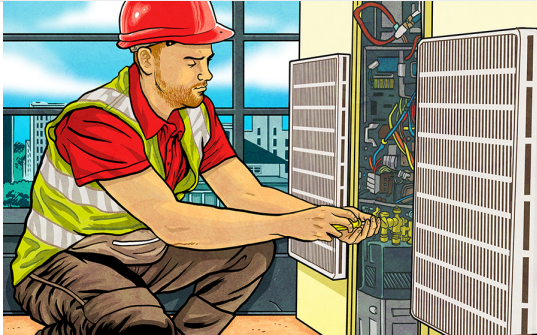
Seraph 7 Studios, headed by founder Jules Porter, makes online games that feature monsters posing as racism, gender inequality and more. One game, Ultimate Elder Battle Royale, features elderly women who combat enemies with "weaponized walkers."

Other winners were Slick Chicks, a maker of lingerie, and FitnesCity, a provider of fitness and wellness tests.

One of the 12 finalists was Forty Acre Co-op, a hemp growing and sales operation in Pine County started by Angela Dawson and Harold Robinson. The couple's ancestors lost farms as Black-owned farms declined precipitously during the 20th century due partly to government-abided restrictions. They are trying to build a network of high-quality hemp growers and premium-branded products.

The 12 Meda Challenge finalists from six states participated in the Bootcamp for Successful Pitches before 40 volunteer judges this week.

The past three years of the Meda Challenge resulted in 18 minority-owned businesses from nine states receiving financial awards. Four of this year's five winning businesses are women-owned.



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