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Alumnus Gives Gift for Start-up Ventures

Micro-grants established for entrepreneurially minded students

MAY 17, 2022 BY JACQUELYN DELAVALDENE

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Luke Ramsey, a recent recipient of a CIE Discovery Grant, presents during the first round of the Gillespie Business Plan Competition. Ramsey's company, Dashh, is an app bringing social media to the automotive industry, offering forums between dealerships, detailers, auto shops and the like, as well as management of warranties, finances, marketing and reporting. Photo by Stella Connell/UM School of Business Administration

OXFORD, Miss. – Owens Alexander has been involved with the [University of Mississippi's Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship](#) since its inception and, after retiring, wanted to encourage students to think about starting their own businesses.

A 1971 Ole Miss alumnus, Alexander also serves as both a mentor for students and a judge at local competitions.

In the fall of 2021, Alexander saw an opportunity to assist students by creating the CIE Discovery Grant, in which he and his wife, Emily, will provide 10 grants a year for 10 years. These micro-grants will allow entrepreneurial-minded students to begin their business ventures.

"The 'good idea' is the key thing to validate very early in the process," he said. "Far too often, student entrepreneurs get focused on their solution – the product or service, app, etc. – before first finding out whether they are solving a problem people want solved and whether their proposed solution will be wanted by their target customers."

The new grants provide funding for Ole Miss students to test their ideas with potential customers, said Tong Meng, director of programs for the CIE.

"Customer discovery is essential to the success of startups, and this grant will help our students gain valuable customer insights and improve their business," Meng said.

Timber Heard, owner of Talitha Kumi Jewels, and Lucas Ramsey, owner of Ramsey Auto Group and creator of Dashh, are two recipients of this year's CIE Discovery grant.

After spending six years in foster care and being emancipated at the age of 18, Heard created her business with an idea to minister to others and reflect her faith in Jesus.

Heard donates 10% of the proceeds from Talitha Kumi Jewels to the University of Life Church, in which Prophetess Denona Benson showcased her work in a fashion show. All benefits from the fashion show went to a shelter run by Benson for women in transition.

The CIE grant will help with living expenses, as Heard recently earned a spot in the Paris Fashion Week and needs to hire labor to fulfill

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Campus Briefs

Civil Engineering Professor Receives Most-Cited Paper Award

OXFORD, Miss. – Peer recognition is a rewarding experience for anyone, but University of Mississippi researcher Amir Mehrara Molan was elated when an article he co-authored recently received the Most Cited Paper Award at the 102nd Transportation Research Board meeting in the nation's capital. The International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology presented the civil engineering

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to



Owens and Emily Alexander attend a reception at Memory House honoring the establishment of the Roper Scholarships. The Alexanders have created a new grant program through the Center of Innovation and Entrepreneurship to assist student entrepreneurs with their business ventures. Photo by Kirsten Faulkner/University Development

her orders, she said.

At 12, recipient Lucas Ramsey created Ramsey Auto Group in St. Louis. In 2017, Ramsey was detailing cars for more than 300 clients and began using eBay to sell used car key fobs to vendors across the country.

In 2019, Ramsey started his latest venture, Dashh, an app that allows auto industry professionals and shops to connect with customers and other shops to maximize their profitability and learn from peers in the industry. The app also allows owners to purchase and buy products for their businesses and manage

almost every aspect of daily operations, Ramsey said.

He plans to use the CIE Discovery Grant to further develop the application and add new features.

An important quote that Ramsey coined and uses frequently in seminars and when mentoring is, "Take every opportunity that presents itself to you, because one just might be the difference in your success."

The CIE staff selected recipients for this year's grants based on the quality of their applications and a follow-up interview. Both Heard and Ramsey demonstrate what hard work can do and the importance of starting early.

"We are very pleased with the gift from Owens and Emily since it helps our students start and expand new businesses," said Ken Cyree, dean of the **School of Business Administration**. "It is especially rewarding because Owens saw firsthand how funding and faculty guidance help foster an entrepreneurial climate through experiential learning.

"This gift will help multiple future entrepreneurs to prove business concepts and to jump-start their companies, and we are grateful for their generosity."

Alexander, who worked 21 years for BellSouth in Atlanta and Jackson, held executive positions at Southern California Edison and Science Applications International Corp., and was CEO of Titan Wireless, an international telecom firm based in San Diego. He also co-founded and served as CEO of the startup Real Phone Corp. in 2007.

In 2013, the Alexanders moved to Oxford, where he served as entrepreneur-in-residence for the CIE and instructor of entrepreneurship until 2019.

Established in 2014, the center's mission is to inspire students "to create innovative businesses through excellent teaching, exceptional service and world-class research." With programs such as the CIE Discovery Grant program, students can begin the journey to create a business venture and start their future.

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