Forté Foods takes grand prize in Pitch Friday competition

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Adam Rubin (BSM ’26) and Jill Rubin (SSE ’27) pitched their protein-fortified pasta sauce company, Forté Foods, to judges during the Grand Prize Round of the 2026 Pitch Friday Competition.

Forté Foods, a startup creating protein-fortified pasta sauces, won the top prize of $15,000 in cash and $2,500 in pro bono legal services during the Grand Prize Round of this year’s **Pitch Friday Competition**. The competition, hosted annually by the Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, was held Friday, April 17 in the Goldring/Woldenberg Business Complex’s Marshall Family Commons.

Led by Adam Rubin (BSM ’26), Sam Klein (BSM ’27) and Jill Rubin (SSE ’27), the company produces a marinara sauce that delivers eight times the amount of protein per serving as a regular pasta sauce. Adam Rubin said the company is capitalizing on growing interest in protein-dense food, noting the protein-infused food market is

projected to double within the next decade, growing from $57 billion to over $117 billion in annual sales.

“People are changing the way they’re eating,” he said. “Seventy percent of Americans are actively trying to increase their protein intake. Protein has become mainstream.”

Rubin said he got the idea for Forté Foods after being diagnosed with ulcerative colitis as a teenager.

“The diagnosis made me completely rethink what I was eating,” he said. “It inspired me to create a clean, nutrient-dense protein food that also tastes great. I was proud to serve the judges the sauce because I know it tastes really good.”

The prize money will allow Forté Foods to fund research and development activities for a new vegetarian alfredo sauce line and a new spicy marinara line. The money will also allow the company to grow its paid media presence and harness user-generated content for advertising.

Gay LeBreton, managing director of Chaffe & Associates, who served as one of the competition’s four judges, said she was convinced both by the company’s track record of success and its growth potential.

“All of the teams were remarkable, but Forté Foods stood out because they’ve already managed to get the product developed and sell it,” LeBrenton said. “I think they have a much larger addressable market that they could take advantage of.”

Alex Trostorff, a private investor who also served as a judge, said he found Forté Foods’ origin story compelling.

“Adam’s personal story had a lot to do with their success,” Trostorff said. “Plus, they had really strong branding, and the sauce itself tasted really good.”



Adam Rubin (BSM ’26) and Jill Rubin (SSE ’27) distribute samples of their protein marinara sauce to judges during the Pitch Friday Competition.

The Grand Prize Round was the culmination of this year's Pitch Friday Series, a monthly competition that allows young entrepreneurs to pitch their ventures to judges for a chance at $1,500 in cash and a spot in the grand prize round. In addition to Forté Foods, two other startups placed in the competition and received monetary rewards.

WhatGradeWillItGet.com, an AI-assisted sports and trading card grading service led by Chance Kittrell (BSM ’27), took home second place and a cash prize of $7,500. The company provides digital pre-grading appraisals for baseball, basketball, Pokémon, Yu-Gi-Oh and other trading cards, helping sellers estimate card value before submitting to official grading companies. To receive an appraisal, users upload photos of their cards, and an AI agent provides a damage assessment before the company’s expert graders verify the analysis.

BuzzinGum, a caffeine-infused gum startup led by Trip McLaughlin (BSM ’27) and Zach Mitra (SSE ’27), won third place and a prize of $5,000. The company’s gum line promises customers increased focus without the sugar crash associated with traditional energy drinks.

Grand Prize round competitors also included **NORA**, an AI-powered anti-bias maternal health monitoring tool created by Jordan Williams (SLA ’26), and **Papertrail**, a social platform created by Ian Faul (SSE ’26, SLA ’26) and Keona Patel (SLA ’26) that aims to be the Goodreads for academic research and conversations.

Trostorff said he was honored to serve as a judge for an event that helps make the Freeman School unique.

“They’re doing a great thing here at Tulane by giving undergraduates the chance to participate in a competition like this,” he said. “I wish more business schools would hold competitions like this because they’re so valuable to student entrepreneurs.”

“Pitch Friday has been a good way to prepare ourselves as entrepreneurs,” Rubin said. “We really nailed down our pitch and our margins. It’s a great feeling to know the hard work I put in paid off.”