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# Contest for startup companies, storytellers, offers hefty prizes

By Daniella Limoli

A new campaign looks to award a total of \$15,000 in prizes to one start-up business and three storytellers looking to champion the name of Athens County.

The Athens County Economic Development Council, also known as [Athens Business Remixed](#), in conjunction with partnering sponsor Ohio University Innovation Center, is hosting the first Start It Up! Athens contest.

Alaina Shearer, who is leading the public relations and marketing effort for Start It Up! Athens, explained that the contest consists of two parts.

The \$10,000 grant portion will benefit one business wishing to grow, expand or launch in Athens County in 2013. The storytelling and spirit competition will award \$3,000, \$1,250 and \$750 to first, second and third places, respectively, to entries that best tell the story of Athens County.

Shearer, who founded Columbus-based [Cement Marketing](#) (but grew up in Athens), explained that the only stipulations of the \$10,000 grant portion are that the money must be put to use in 2013 and in Athens County.

"It can be any business idea from any industry. It can be a local farmer who wants to buy new equipment... to an e-commerce store. It really could be any type of business expansion or any new business," she said.

To enter, applicants must post a short YouTube video explaining what the business is, why it's good for Athens, and what attracted him or her to Athens County. The number of views the video receives will also be put into the score — more views showing that the business is a viable and exciting idea.

As for the storytelling contest, past and present Athens County residents as well as Ohio University students are encouraged to explain what drew them to Athens. This can be through words, photos or video(s) — the only catch? They must be submitted and shared online through platforms such as Flickr, Facebook, Wordpress or Youtube, Shearer explained.

To enter, applicants simply have to link their work back to [Start It Up Athens](#) and complete a short entry form. The more shares and views the better.

"The goal is to attract businesses to Athens County and to do so by telling the story of Athens County and who better to tell it than those of us who love it here and live here?" Todd Shelton, director of the Athens County Economic Development Council, said in a press release.

Athens resident Caitlin Kight said that she entered the storytelling contest because she enjoys writing and photography.

"I have both a travel and a science blog, and I love Athens, so it seemed like a fun project combining all of the above," she said. "I also wanted to take up the challenge of capturing the essence of my hometown in the same way I try to capture the essence (in my blog posts) of the new towns I visit when I travel."

Ohio University senior Julie Kallenborn said that her video entry explains that the scenery, people and expression of Athens are all inextricably linked.

"I entered the contest because I thought the idea was cool and because I love Athens," she said.

Shearer added that not only is the goal of the contest to grow business in Athens, but also to improve its buzz online. A simple Google or YouTube search, she said, will typically return less-than-flattering results reflecting a party-school



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reputation. This is the basis behind likes, shares and views contributing to applicants' scores.

"We're really trying to call on the community and people who already love living here to tell the Athens story online so we can ultimately change the results on a Google search or on YouTube," she said. "It's ambitious but it's what we're trying to do."

Shearer added, "We're trying to get the community to come forward and tell their side of the story. Why do you live here? Why did you stay after you went to OU? What do you love about this place? I think it's hard to articulate how incredible Athens is."

The deadline to enter is Nov. 10, with awards announcements made on January 9.

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