

*For immediate release*

## **FirstOntario Credit Union's 1Awards competition puts the spotlight on local small business growth**

*Three local businesses share \$150,000 in cash and in-kind services*

**Hamilton ON, May 10, 2016** –Blackbird Studios, the Mustard Seed Co-op and Gameopolis shared \$150,000 in cash and in-kind services as part of FirstOntario's fifth annual 1Awards competition, announced Tuesday morning at Liuna Station.

"As a credit union, we really put a focus on small and medium-sized businesses because we know they are a huge driver of our economy," said James Lefebvre, Associate Vice President Business Services at FirstOntario Credit Union. "This is really a celebration of how they contribute to our community. There are so many great businesses right here in our own backyard and we continue to support and encourage them. "

Blackbird Studios is a designer Canadian label with a shop on James Street North. Gameopolis is Hamilton's first board game lounge on King Street East and the Mustard Seed Co-op is a co-operatively owned grocery store on York Boulevard.

The winners faced a tough battle as they competed in a group of 10 successful Hamilton small business finalists. The finalists presented to a panel of judges at the end of April and shared ideas about growth and future success in our community.

This year's competition saw a record 41 applications from Hamilton and Burlington entrepreneurs. FirstOntario and 1Awards partners have invested over \$650 thousand dollars into Hamilton's small business landscape. FirstOntario and The Hamilton Spectator put on the competition in partnership with Agro Zaffiro LLP, KPMG, Mohawk College, Weever Apps, PLAY Advertising and Biz Magazine.

The 1Awards is just one of the ways FirstOntario continues to encourage small business development in Hamilton and Niagara. Credit unions are ranked as the preferred lender to small businesses by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business' Battle of the Banks Survey 2013.

### **For more information, please contact:**

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## Background

### **About FirstOntario Credit Union**

In business since 1939, FirstOntario Credit Union has 107,000 Members and \$3.9 billion in assets under management. The credit union is the second largest credit union in Ontario providing a full suite of banking products including daily banking, mortgages, lines of credit, loans and investments. FirstOntario has 31 locations, serving 14 communities across the Hamilton, Halton, Niagara, Haldimand/Norfolk, Brant, Norwich, and Oxford regions as well as free access at 2,400 ATMs across Canada. Membership at FirstOntario is open to anyone. FirstOntario is a proud advocate of the communities we serve and supports many important community organizations. FirstOntario also supports entrepreneurship through the 1Awards, which assists small businesses with plans for expansion through in-kind and cash sponsorship. For more information please visit: [www.FirstOntario.com](http://www.FirstOntario.com).

### **The1Awards**

The goal of the 1Awards is to help local businesses get to the next level by recognizing and rewarding ideas for growth and community-focused plans. This is the fifth annual 1Awards small business competition in Hamilton which now also considers Burlington entrepreneurs. Due to its growing success, the program has expanded to Niagara in a separate competition. Established businesses must demonstrate measurable growth such as workplace expansion, innovation and economic impact in their local communities to be eligible for cash and specialized in-kind services provided by 1Awards partners. Hamilton partners include The Hamilton Spectator, Agro Zaffiro LLP, KPMG, Mohawk College, Weever Apps, PLAY Advertising and Biz Magazine.

### **The Winners**

#### **Blackbird Studios**

Blackbird Studios is a Canadian designer label, based out of Hamilton Ontario. Designers Kerry Wade and Lynn Bebee have been part of the forefront of the city's burgeoning fashion, arts and culture scene for the past decade. Their "MADE IN HAMILTON" clothing line and accessories are showcased at their newly located boutique storefront, located at 123 James Street North.

#### **Mustard Seed Co-op**

The Mustard Seed Co-op is Hamilton's co-operatively-owned grocery store, with a growing ownership base of 2,200 members – roughly 1% of Hamilton households. The Mustard Seed Co-op provides owners and the general public with high-quality wholesome and affordable foods, prioritizing products from producers throughout our region. The Co-op works with over 230 local producers, helping support and grow our local food economy.

#### **Gameopolis**

Nick Shier and Jessica Maurice are co-owners of Hamilton's first board game lounge. Gameopolis offers more than 800 board games from all genres: strategy, party, family and kids, trivia and more. For only \$5 per person, guests can play as many games as they like with no time limit. Guests can also enjoy Hamilton-local coffees, teas, and craft beer as well as market-fresh sandwiches and snack options.