

For immediate release

FirstOntario Credit Union's Inaugural 1Awards Niagara puts the spotlight on local small business growth

Three local businesses share \$115,000 in cash and in-kind services

Niagara ON, June 23, 2016 – El Gastrónomo Vagabundo (Peapod Cuisine), Tootzie's Tune-Up and Urge to Purge shared \$115,000 in cash and in-kind services as part of FirstOntario's first-ever 1Awards in Niagara, announced Wednesday evening at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre.

"FirstOntario really puts 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, FirstOntario Credit Union. "We support these businesses and we want to help them take the next step in their business growth. It's about celebrating promising entrepreneurs in Niagara and helping them get to that next level."

El Gastrónomo Vagabundo is a mobile food truck that serves up gourmet cuisine throughout Niagara and the surrounding area. Tootzie's Tune-Up offers a unique "hair and maintenance" experience for men and women on Scott Street in St. Catharines and Urge to Purge, with its home base on Thorold Road in Welland, declutters homes in Niagara and beyond.

The competition saw 26 applications from local entrepreneurs within the Niagara Region in its inaugural year. The winners faced a tough battle as they competed in a group of seven successful small business finalists who presented to a panel of judges at the end of May. They shared their ideas about growth and future success in their community.

Community partners include Niagara College, Niagara Region, KPMG, Lancaster, Brooks & Welch LLP, Business Link Niagara, form & affect and The St. Catharines Standard who joined FirstOntario to provide the cash and in-kind prizes.

The awards were developed in 2012 in Hamilton to promote and support the small businesses that fuel the local economy and make our communities unique. The awards expanded to Niagara in a separate competition after continuous years of incredible success. 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.

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Background

About FirstOntario Credit Union

In business since 1939, FirstOntario Credit Union has 107,000 Members and \$4 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.

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. Hamilton recently celebrated its fifth annual 1Awards small business competition which now also considers Burlington entrepreneurs. The program has expanded to Niagara in a separate competition due to its growing success. 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. Niagara partners include Niagara College, Niagara Region, KPMG, Lancaster, Brooks & Welch LLP, Business Link Niagara, form & affect and The St. Catharines Standard

The Winners

El Gastrónomo Vagabundo (Peapod Cuisine)

El Gastrónomo Vagabundo is an award-winning pioneer of the Ontario gourmet street food movement, offering a continuously changing menu of globally inspired gourmet cuisine that celebrates the bounty of Niagara. Australian-born Chef Adam Hynam-Smith is the author of *Curbside: Modern Street Food from a Vagabond Chef (Whitecap)*, and is a Chef-Host on Food Network Canada's *Restaurant Takeover*. Hynam-Smith and his partner Tamara Jensen strive to foster innovation and collaboration in the Niagara food scene, partnering with craft breweries, wineries, and fellow chefs to create highly interactive and imaginative dining experiences.

Tootzie's Tune-Up

More and more men care about their appearance and more women are demanding of their men to take care of themselves. Tootzie's offers bumper-to-bumper premium elite grooming services from your hair to your tootzies in a comfortable environment. With a full liquor licence, Tootzie's has created a new category in the industry by putting the BAR in BARberSpa. Tootzie's has taken the barbershop, the spa, the hair salon and a sports bar and combined all of these into a garage-themed background. #TootziesTime vibe is enjoyed by all family members.

Urge To Purge

Urge to Purge (UTP) is a Niagara-based, multi-Level service company focusing on unique client needs as they pertain to decluttering, including: decluttering & organizing,

commercial cleaning, hoarding remediation, packing & downsizing, junk removal, estate appraisals & clean outs with a charitable retail store location. The core business is engineered around decluttering client's homes and helping them to reclaim their space. UTP works with the client to develop a structured approach designed specifically to their individual needs and limitations. By tailoring each project to the client, it becomes possible to restore the spirit, revitalize the mind and reinvent the home.