

The Randall family sparks entrepreneurial talent and innovation

Joa Paulo Coelho, a biochemist, loves to play basketball, but the sport has taken a physical toll on him, including surgeries for a torn ACL and knee problems. Recovering from recent knee surgery, he's all too familiar with the regimens of physical therapy, which interrupt his busy schedule of work and family obligations. *Can't all those bending and stretching exercises just be done at home instead of spending hours each week in therapy?* he wonders. Still, he hobbles to his sessions, unaware that he'll soon be part of a collaboration to transform the rehabilitation setting.

At the time, Coelho worked as a manager in several orthopaedic labs at Pitt. In the fall of 2010, he also began pursuing an MBA degree in finance in Pitt's Katz Graduate School of Business. During this time, he became involved with a work project involving a physical therapy-monitoring device that his lab colleagues—Pitt graduate engineering students Robert Hartman and Kevin Bell—had already developed. The device used two small motion sensors and Bluetooth technology to relay live data about patients' movements as they occurred. The prototype proved to be a useful tool in the orthopaedic research labs, and the trio began to think it might also have real commercial potential.

a panel of expert judges along with Pitt students, faculty, alumni, entrepreneurs, investors, and program sponsors. The goal of the competition is to showcase and support Pitt's growing innovation network and foster entrepreneurship.

The Randall Family Big Idea Competition, organized by the Katz School's David Berg Center for Ethics and Leadership, has given graduate and undergraduate Pitt students an opportunity to transform their entrepreneurial ideas

into potentially successful start-ups. In 2013, the competition awarded a total of \$85,000 to Pitt students and their winning projects in each of these categories: Energy and Technology, Life Sciences, Social Innovation, Pitt Innovation, and Wild Card.

Among the winners were Coelho (BUS Class '14), Hartman (ENGR Class '14), and Bell (ENGR '13G). Their project, called InterACTION, won in the Life Sciences division and received \$20,000.



for development. For the team, the win came as a surprise, but it also brought a new realization: What began as the offshoot of a research project now had the resources to become an extraordinary commercial product.

Supporting education, particularly of young entrepreneurs, has long been a tradition for Robert Randall (A&S '65), a University of Pittsburgh trustee who created the Big Idea Competition in 2009. His roots in giving are deep. In 1977, he and his family established a foundation to honor his sister, Charity Randall, who was killed that year in an automobile accident. The Charity Randall Foundation reflects her values and is devoted to nurturing education, the environment, and the arts; its support has included a masterful restoration of the Charity Randall Theatre in the Stephen Foster Memorial on campus.

Robert Randall is an entrepreneur who has worked in manufacturing and biosciences. He is president of the Rand Group, a real-estate development firm in Wexford, Pa. "The more experience we can generate from an earlier age from an entrepreneurship standpoint, the better our country, our region, and the result will be," he says.

Among the judges reviewing the 19 projects and presentations on the night of the 2013 competition in Alumni Hall, judge Nehal Bhojak observed the InterACTION team and listened closely to its pitch during the final rounds. She has been a judge since the competition's inception, and she was impressed by the team's articulate and innovative presentation. As director of health-care and lifescience initiatives with the Pittsburgh-based Idea Foundry, she knows this project is a great fit with her organization's goals—to invest in promising projects, mentor

entrepreneurs, and transform ideas into viable businesses. All five of the winning teams are paired with "accelerators," local organizations like the Idea Foundry, to help further cultivate their projects. "The biggest benefit that we get is having the opportunity to work with the Idea Foundry," Coelho says.

As InterACTION's project gains traction, so, too, does the Big Idea Competition. Randall plans to increase the prize funding for next year's competition and hopes to see even more contestants. While the competition bolsters the ideas of young entrepreneurs, it also proves that Big Ideas—even when wrapped in small packages—nurture and develop emerging talent and entrepreneurial innovation in the region.

Visit www.business.pitt.edu/katz/berg/bigidea for more information on the Randall Family Big Idea Competition. ■



From left, Joao Paulo Coelho, Kevin Bell, and Robert Hartman.

AL NOVAK

A research university is an incubator of innovation. New technologies developed at the University of Pittsburgh create successful businesses that can help advance our region in many ways. In recent years, Provost Patricia A. Beeson, an urban economics scholar, has championed innovation as a renewed institutional priority.

Pitt Trustee Bob Randall shares the Provost's belief in the importance of innovation. In 2011, he and his family made a very generous contribution to the entrepreneurial idea competition established by the Institute for Entrepreneurial Excellence in the Joseph M. Katz Graduate School of Business in 2009. That generosity led the organizers to rename the event the Randall Family Big Idea Competition, which you can read about on the accompanying page.

Bob remains closely involved with this annual event. He enjoys the time he spends with students and faculty in a competition where Pitt teams vie for prize money that can help them further develop their ideas and prototypes for emerging products or services, some of which have already become the basis of economically viable businesses. As an entrepreneur, Bob brings valuable expertise to these ventures, and he has a unique understanding of how important innovation is to the success of our region and the wider community. Also, gifts from donors like Bob are helping Pitt fulfill its mission of preparing students to compete in a global marketplace and of fostering innovation that drives economic prosperity.

Because of the enthusiasm, vision, and generosity of Pitt donors, the University of Pittsburgh has exceeded every capital-campaign expectation. As of June 30, 2013, our campaign has officially concluded after raising more than \$2.135 billion to support our students and faculty. I would like to thank Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg, our University's senior leadership team, the Trustees, and the more than 189,000 donors to our \$2 billion Building Our Future Together campaign for their exceptional support.

Our work, however, continues as higher education remains key to building better lives. Your ongoing investment in Pitt students, faculty, programs, and research will help to ensure that the University remains a leader in innovation and discovery—the engines that will drive our future.

Hail to Pitt,
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Vice Chancellor
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