

Silicon Oasis

powered by Arizona Ascent



Christine Mackay: Shaping the Future of Greater Phoenix

Named as new CEO, she's shaping Greater Phoenix's next chapter. pages 31-32

Bonus Homes Bring \$65.5M Innovation to Phoenix

\$65.5M raise powers Bonus Homes' move to the Valley page 23

Disruption in the Desert: Arizona Tech Week

Arizona's inaugural decentralized tech conference for founders, investors, and innovators. pages 33-35

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR EDITOR



Kyle Macdonald
Editor-in-Chief,
Silicon Oasis

Arizona isn't waiting for the future of tech—it's building it right now. In just the past few months, we've seen local founders raise tens of millions, national investors turn their eyes to the Valley, and bold leaders step into roles that will shape our region for decades.

What excites me most is how these wins connect. **Bonus Homes'** \$65.5M move to Phoenix isn't just a funding headline—it's proof that proptech belongs here. **Soraban's** AI breakthrough is giving firms back their most precious resource: time. And with **Christine Mackay** stepping in as the next **CEO of GPEC**, the Valley has a leader ready to turn vision into measurable impact.

None of this is happening in isolation. **Arizona Tech Week** is set to unite founders, investors, and innovators from across the state into a single story of momentum. And behind every deal, every demo, and every headline are people—builders, dreamers, risk-takers—who believe that Arizona's desert can grow companies that change the world.

That's what **Silicon Oasis** is here to capture. Not someday, not eventually—but now. As you turn these pages, I hope you see both the progress we're making and the role you can play in it. Because the truth is simple: the future of Arizona's tech ecosystem will be built together. Thanks for being part of it.



VISION & IMPACT

Transforming Arizona into a global tech hub led by local founders, built for the future.

Silicon Oasis is a nonprofit dedicated to uniting Arizona’s tech ecosystem. Our mission is to strengthen the local innovation economy by bringing together founders, investors, and entrepreneurs—and by creating spaces where collaboration can thrive.

We do this in three key ways:

- Centralizing the Ecosystem through startup-focused events and practical workshops led by experienced builders and funders.
- Cultivating Community by fostering authentic, expectation-free connections that go beyond traditional networking.
- Spotlighting Talent with dynamic video podcasts and media that highlight Arizona’s most promising innovators.

Pillar Partners



Driving Arizona’s AI future by connecting founders to mentorship, talent, and capital.



Accelerating defense and aerospace innovation through founder support, workforce development, and mission-aligned industry partnerships.



Founder-led software community uniting Arizona builders through events, peer groups, and startup-focused resources.

AZ CLEANTECH

Uniting Arizona’s climate innovators across energy, water, and mobility to accelerate clean tech collaboration.



A community uniting real estate, construction, and tech innovators to shape Arizona’s built environment.

OASIS PITCH NIGHT: WHERE IDEAS TAKE ROOT

Oasis Pitch Night brings Arizona's healthcare innovators together with investors from across the Valley and beyond.

By Jennifer Conrad, Contributing Editor

On an early October evening, as the sun melts into the Phoenix skyline, something new is stirring in the Valley of the Sun. Beneath the glow of desert twilight, a gathering of founders, investors, and innovators will mark the beginning of a fresh chapter in Arizona's healthcare story.

Welcome to the first-ever **Oasis Pitch Night**, debuting Wednesday, October 8, 2025, a bi-monthly event designed to spotlight the state's rising stars in MedTech, HealthTech, and Biotech.

A Different Kind of Stage

Pitch events are nothing new in Arizona, but Oasis is different. Equal parts showcase and community catalyst, the night blends high-stakes storytelling with the casual ease of a mixer. Instead of fluorescent lights and stiff suits, expect craft cocktails, laughter, and the hum of possibility in the air.



Silicon Oasis Community

Three to five founders will each have five minutes to pitch their vision. Then comes the pressure: a rapid-fire Q&A with seasoned industry leaders, followed by an open mic where audience members can pose their toughest questions.

The format is intentionally lean and lively, designed to keep the energy high and the barriers low giving bold ideas the platform they need to spark meaningful connections.

Powered by Arizona's Medical Entrepreneurs

The event is hosted by the Arizona Chapter of the Society of Physician Entrepreneurs (SOPE-AZ), part of a global network committed to empowering healthcare professionals through entrepreneurship. Members range from doctors and nurses to biotech researchers and engineers all united by a drive to turn medical insight into real-world impact.

By rooting Oasis Pitch Night in the SOPE community, the event connects Arizona's healthcare innovation ecosystem at every level from frontline physicians with fresh ideas to investors seeking the next transformative startup.

Beyond the Desert

For **Josue Romero**, co-founder of **Silicon Oasis**, Oasis Pitch Night represents more than just another event. It's a sign that Arizona's innovation ecosystem is drawing attention from well beyond state lines.

"Believe it or not, this is history in the making for Arizona tech," Romero says. "Oasis Pitch Night will give five startups a stage to pitch in front of investors from across the Valley—and beyond."

For him, that interest underscores Silicon Oasis's mission. "We take our role of uniting and spotlighting Arizona tech pretty seriously," Romero says. "Oasis Pitch Night isn't just about showing local investors what's happening here, it's about showing the rest of the country what Arizona can build."

Where Sparks Become Fire

But the pitches themselves are only half the story. The real magic happens in the moments after. Investors huddle in corners, comparing notes on who's worth a follow up. Founders trade war stories and encouragement. And sometimes, a chance conversation between a biotech entrepreneur and an AI engineer evolves into a partnership that shapes the future.

It's these collisions—unexpected, serendipitous, and distinctly human—that give Oasis its name. In a desert known for both grit and growth, this event promises to be a watering hole for ideas that could transform healthcare.

Arizona's Moment

Healthcare innovation is one of Arizona's fastest-growing sectors, fueled by research institutions, startup accelerators, and a community eager to solve real-world problems. Oasis Pitch Night arrives at a pivotal moment, offering not just a stage but a springboard for ideas with the potential to improve lives.

Whether you're a physician with a concept scribbled on a napkin, an investor hunting for the next unicorn, or a curious innovator ready to plug into the ecosystem, Oasis is more than an event; it's an invitation. The desert is blooming with innovation. The only question is: Will you be there to witness it?

[Register for Oasis Pitch Night Here](#)

THE FUTURE OF PHX TECH: HACKER HOUSE DEBUT

Three bold startups take the stage to reveal the next wave of Phoenix technology.

By Jennifer Conrad, Contributing Editor

Six weeks ago, a group of Arizona founders walked into **Loloft** with laptops under their arms and big ideas in their heads. They didn't come for comfort—they came for pressure.

Hosted by **Silicon Oasis** and **Devlabs**, Arizona's first hacker house program wasn't about living under one roof. It was about building under one roof. **Loloft's** warehouse-style coworking space became a launchpad where days started early, nights stretched long, and whiteboards filled with sketches of products that didn't exist yet. Code was written, scrapped, and rewritten. Mentors dropped in to sharpen pitches, challenge assumptions, and sometimes tear ideas apart so better ones could emerge.

Eight startups. Twelve builders. Countless late nights. That intensity became the rhythm of **DevHouse 2025**, a first-of-its-kind sprint backed by **PHX Ventures**, **AZ-VC**, and the **Arizona Commerce Authority** and fueled by sponsors like **Blockchain Unmasked**, **Novel Ice Cream**, and the team at **Loloft**.

The bet was simple: put ambitious people in the same space with the right structure, and something extraordinary will happen.



Silicon Oasis Community

On Demo Day, the bet paid off. Investors, VCs, and seasoned founders who've raised millions packed the room shoulder-to-shoulder, the chatter blending with the hum of last-minute pitch tweaks. When certificates were handed to the Class of '25 it wasn't just a graduation; it was proof that Arizona's startup scene could stand shoulder-to-shoulder with bigger hubs.

Reinventing Everyday Industries

The first pitch to land made it clear that **DevHouse** wasn't about flashy gimmicks; it was about solving real problems in industries most people never think twice about.

Mark, cofounder of **BINsr AI.**, stood with the quiet confidence of someone who knew his wedge into the market was undeniable. Home inspections aren't glamorous, but they're essential and they haven't changed much in decades. Reports take hours to compile, inspectors spend as much time typing as they do look, and homeowners often wait until nightfall for results.

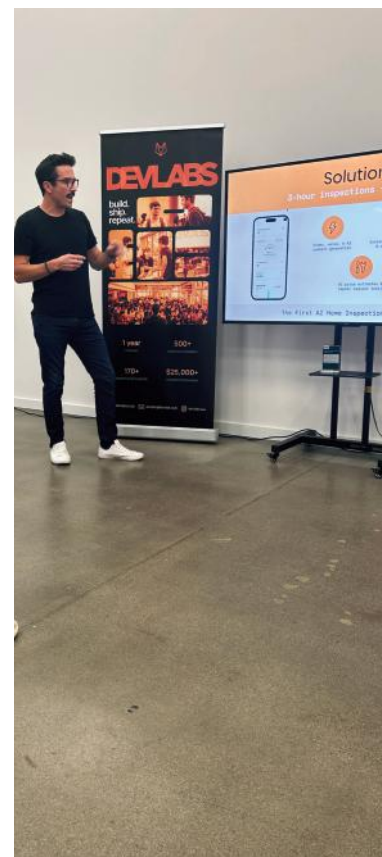
BINsr AI. flips that script. By embedding artificial intelligence directly into the workflow, the platform cuts documentation time in half. Inspectors can snap photos of defects, and the system suggests relevant comments on the spot. Voice recognition captures observations even in noisy environments, and cross-device syncing means a report can be generated before the inspector leaves the driveway. Add scheduling, payments, and even optional marketing tools, and you get a one-stop shop that saves inspectors from hours of after-work drudgery.

What used to take three hours now takes 90 minutes. Forty-seven inspectors are already on the waitlist, and with a 40% cold outbound conversion rate, adoption looks less like a question and more like inevitability. **BINsr AI.** proved that even in the most traditional industries, speed and intelligence win.



At Silicon Oasis, we spotlight Arizona's tech ecosystem. DevHouse gives builders mentorship, space, and community, so no startup goes unnoticed.

Josue Romero
Silicon Oasis



*Forty-seven inspectors are already on the waitlist for **BINsr AI.***

Silicon Oasis Community

When Science Meets Urgency

If **BINsr AI** showed the power of efficiency, **CETARA** showed the weight of urgency. Their mission: tackling PFAS, the so-called “forever chemicals” linked to cancer, infertility, and immune disorders. With **EPA** mandates kicking in by 2026, municipalities need solutions fast—but the science is scattered across countless studies, often hidden behind paywalls.

CETARA pulls that research into the light. Their AI-driven platform centralizes peer-reviewed **PFAS** filtration data and turns it into actionable insights for engineers, water utilities, and municipalities. The system not only points to the most effective treatment strategies; it provides citations for full transparency.

Co-founders **Mary Sannapu** and **Eleazar Ripsam**, both from **ASU**, have built a team that blends academic depth with entrepreneurial drive. With PhD researchers **Shinyun Park** and **Yanji Tian**, plus guidance from faculty advisor Dr. **Tiezheng Tong**, they bring rigor and credibility to a problem that demands both.

Already used in **ASU’s TALM Research Group** and headed to major international conferences, **CETARA’s** platform is more than theory. On stage, their pitch carried urgency that resonated: solving **PFAS** isn’t just about compliance, it’s about health, safety, and the future of clean water.

Hospitality, Reimagined

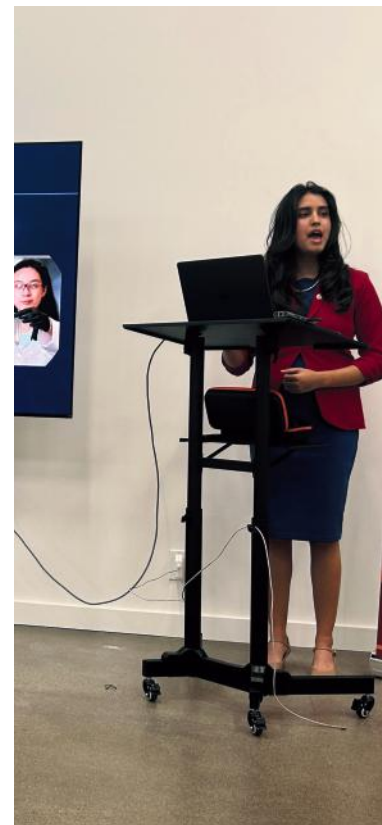
From water to homes to restaurants, the night’s themes kept circling back to a common thread: making human systems work better. No one embodied that more than **Obotiq**, a Tempe-based robotics company asking a simple question: what if robots felt like teammates instead of tools?

“Hospitality has always been about the human experience,” the team told the audience. “Our role is to create technology that protects that experience while making operations more efficient.”



Our role is to create technology that protects that experience while making operations more efficient.

Natalie Levi
OBOTIQ



***CETARA’s** AI-powered platform centralizes peer-reviewed PFAS filtration data.*

Silicon Oasis Community

Their machines don't shuffle around like stiff, soulless automation. They glide with intention, greet guests, answer simple questions, and deliver meals with a presence that feels welcoming rather than mechanical.

At the heart of their vision is **Flux**, a sleek black, three-shelf service robot with a touchscreen interface. It weaves through crowded dining rooms with ease, adapts to different floor layouts, and speaks multiple languages. For staff, it handles repetitive tasks like food running and waitlist coordination. For diners, it feels futuristic yet approachable, an unexpected partner in the service experience.

The numbers add punch to the pitch: each unit could save restaurants over \$14,000 per month in labor costs, all while improving guest satisfaction. Already crowned winner of **ASU's** top startup competition, **Obotiq** used Demo Day to prove that automation doesn't have to mean less humanity. With **Flux**, they showed the opposite, technology that enhances warmth by taking care of the grind.

The Energy Behind the Builders

While **BINsr AI**, **CETARA**, and **Obotiq** took the spotlight, the real story was in the air: six weeks of relentless focus culminating in a single night. Mentors, peers, and founders pushed one another through late-night sprints and early-morning standups. Eight startups. Twelve builders. One room full of proof that structure plus hustle equals breakthroughs.

The ecosystem showed up, too:

- **Silicon Oasis co-founders Josue Romero and Kyle Macdonald**
- **David Richards (BlockchainUnmasked),**
- **Brendan Howell (Loloft),**
- **Novel Ice Cream & Shawn Allard,**

Handing certificates to the Class of '25 wasn't just symbolic—it was a statement: building the foundation that Arizona startups have been waiting for.



Hosting DevHouse reflects Loloft's mission to give entrepreneurs space and support to scale.

Brendan Howell
LOLOFT



Each Flux unit can save restaurants \$14K+ per month in labor.

PHX FWD + FREEWAY: BUILDING ARIZONA'S SOFTWARE PILLAR

From capital to talent, two organizations are building the foundation Arizona startups have been waiting for.

By Kyle Macdonald, Editor-in-Chief

On August 21st, Phoenix's startup ecosystem got a major boost. **PHX FWD** and **Freeway** officially announced a partnership designed to tackle one of the region's biggest challenges: connecting local software startups with top-tier tech talent.

For Phoenix founders, scaling a company has often meant looking beyond Arizona—for funding, mentorship, and especially skilled engineers. That's starting to change. By joining forces, **PHX FWD** and **Freeway** are creating a comprehensive support system where startups can access mentorship, capital strategies, and the talent they need to grow—all without leaving the Valley.

PHX FWD: Supporting Startup Growth

PHX FWD, now part of **StartupAZ**, is a trusted hub for local software startups. Its programs, including Masterminds and the **Fast FWD Accelerator**, help more than 50 startups navigate growth, secure funding, and connect with mentors and peers.

Inside a recent Masterminds session, founders huddled over laptops, exchanging strategies for fundraising, product development, and customer acquisition.



Silicon Oasis Community

Mentors circulated, offering guidance while peers celebrated each small breakthrough. This is the high-energy ecosystem PHX FWD is cultivating, where startups learn to scale without leaving Arizona for opportunities elsewhere.

Freeway: Connecting Talent to Opportunity

Freeway serves as a community-led platform linking innovators, investors, and civic partners. Its signature Tech Talent Summit has brought together thousands of attendees and dozens of hiring companies, helping local startups fill critical roles and build strong teams.

“This partnership marks a pivotal step in building a talent pipeline that keeps Phoenix startups thriving locally,” said Daniela Santangelo, Freeway Founder and CEO. “By combining our strengths, we can ensure companies not only scale but retain the talent that makes their success possible.”

The Partnership: Bridging Mentorship and Talent

Under this new collaboration, Freeway becomes **PHX FWD’s official Talent Development Community Partner**, working closely to ensure startups can access the people they need to grow. The partnership also aligns with **PHX FWD’s** larger mission: to establish Phoenix as a leading tech hub by 2035 by uniting capital, mentorship, and talent under one ecosystem.

The impact is already visible. Through Freeway’s events and community connections, local startups can engage with engineers and designers. As these companies grow, they help solidify Phoenix’s position as a destination for innovation, creating a cycle of opportunity for both talent and startups alike. Ecosystems aren’t built overnight. They’re shaped step by step, startup by startup, partnership by partnership.



This partnership marks a pivotal step in building a talent pipeline that keeps Phoenix startups thriving locally.

Daniela Santangelo
Freeway



Freeway’s events and community connections, local startups can engage with engineers, and designers.

FUELING ARIZONA STARTUPS: ASU LAUNCHES ACCELERATOR

Two-semester program gives innovators the mentorship, tools, and funding access to scale their ideas.

By Kyle MacDonald, Editor-in-Chief

Big ideas need bold backing, and Arizona just got it. The **W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University** has launched its **Entrepreneurship Accelerator**, a two-semester program designed to help early-stage, investable startups secure pre-seed and seed funding.

“ASU is excellent at engaging and promoting entrepreneurship, and getting people started on their entrepreneurial journey,” says **Jared Byrne**, clinical assistant professor and director of the **Center for Entrepreneurship and New Business Design**. “This program equips founders with hands-on support and the tools to secure external investment, helping them grow their ventures beyond campus.”

A Program Built for Growth

The Accelerator provides participants with a personalized, immersive experience that combines coaching, training, and investor access. Highlights include:

- **Mentorship:** One-on-one and group coaching from experienced founders, investors, and industry experts.



University Moves

- **Training & Resources:** Webinars and workshops on venture funding, product development, storytelling, customer discovery, and more.
- **Investor Pitch Event:** A spring showcase where startups present their ventures to potential backers.
- **Business Designer Option:** Graduate students without a startup can contribute as consultants while earning course credit.

The program is open to the **W. P. Carey** partner community, including local startups and **ASU** alumni, as well as all ASU-affiliated entrepreneurs, students, staff, faculty, and postdoctoral researchers.

Mentors with Real-World Expertise

The Accelerator’s steering committee features leaders with deep experience in entrepreneurship and business education:

- **Ohad Kadan**, Charles J. Robel Dean and W. P. Carey Distinguished Chair
- **Raghu Santanam**, Senior Associate Dean for Executive Education
- **Michele Pfund**, Senior Associate Dean for Education
- **Steve Lockard**, former CEO of TPI Composites and energy investor
- **Jim Waldrop**, serial entrepreneur and former Executive VP of Pulte Homes

Lockard and Waldrop have long supported ASU’s entrepreneurial ecosystem, advising programs such as **New Venture Challenge**, **Venture Devils**, and **Lab to Launch**. In the Accelerator, Lockard leads mentorship, guiding participants on market analysis, audience targeting, financial models, and investor readiness.

“If your business needs \$100,000 to \$500,000 to be venture-ready, you can get the training and potential pre-seed capital here,” Lockard says.

Waldrop heads the program curriculum and resource database, drawing from decades of experience mentoring early-stage ventures.



If your business needs \$100,000 to \$500,000 to be venture-ready, you can get the training and potential pre-seed capital here.

Steve Lockard
TPI Composites



The Accelerator provides participants with a personalized, immersive experience.

University Moves

“This program is a central repository of all things entrepreneurship — a practical roadmap for founders to make their business idea work,” he explains.

The Accelerator also partners with **TiE Phoenix**, a nonprofit organization supporting startups, to offer participants additional mentorship and networking opportunities.

Bridging the Gap Between Training and Funding

ASU offers many opportunities for entrepreneurs, but Byrne notes that the Accelerator fills a critical gap: helping founders with established ventures prepare for external investment.

“There’s a gap between training entrepreneurs and them leaving the university to pursue funding. **The Accelerator** prepares students, faculty, and staff to be investment-ready,” Byrne says.

The **W. P. Carey Entrepreneurship Accelerator** is more than a program — it’s a launchpad for Arizona’s next generation of innovators, providing the mentorship, resources, and funding connections to turn bold ideas into scalable businesses.

Applications are open now. Join **ASU’s Entrepreneurship Accelerator** and take your startup from concept to investment-ready venture.

**Take your startup further —
apply to ASU’s Entrepreneurship
Accelerator today.**



ASU is excellent at engaging and promoting entrepreneurship, and getting people started on their entrepreneurial journey.

Jared Byrne
**Center for Entrepreneurship
and New Business Design**



Investor Pitch Event: A spring showcase where startups present their ventures to potential backers.

BREAKING BARRIERS: U OF A'S RECORD INNOVATION YEAR

324 Inventions in 2025 Cement U of A as a Rising Innovation Hub

By Sylvie Stephens, Contributing Editor

The **University of Arizona** has quietly been building an innovation engine that's now coming onto the global stage. This year, **Tech Launch Arizona** announced its most innovative year yet, with a ground breaking 324 invention disclosures in fiscal year 2025, surpassing last year's milestone and solidifying Arizona's reputation as a rising hub for innovation and entrepreneurship.

The ideas fueling this surge span AI-driven healthcare diagnostics, green-light therapy, solar-powered food waste drying, and beyond. In short, the campus is transforming into a launchpad where innovative research meets real-world impact.

From Campus Labs to Patents and Startups

The numbers behind the record-setting year tell a powerful story. **Tech Launch Arizona** reported:

- **94 patents issued**
- **86 licenses executed**
- **\$12.1 million in royalties and income**
- **13 new startups launched**

Tech Launch Arizona reported

- **94 patents issued**
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- **\$12.1 million in royalties and income**
- **13 new startups launched**

UArizona Startups of 2025

- **Branch Therapeutics**
- **Senhponix**
- **Kuairu**
- **VerdiTx**

University Moves

Each metric represents not just progress but proof that ideas aren't trapped in labs; they're making their way into the hands of doctors, patients, and consumers. One notable highlight was the acquisition of **Neuro-ID**, a fraud detection startup born out of **University of Arizona** research, by global credit firm **Experian**. "These milestones show the full commercialization pipeline in action," said **Doug Hockstad**, TLA's Associate Vice President. "From invention disclosures to startup launches, every stage is moving forward at a pace we've never seen before."

Student Innovation Takes the Stage

2025 also marked the rise of student-driven entrepreneurship. **Startup Wildcats**, a new initiative housed within TLA, supported over 80 student-led ventures this year, awarding more than \$20,000 in milestone funding. Students launched ventures ranging from aquaponics technologies to next-gen AI solutions, tapping into resources once reserved for faculty inventors.

"It just made sense", said director **Derick Maggard**. "If we can help professors turn research into companies, why not help students test their entrepreneurial wings as well?"

The momentum doesn't stop there. With the launch of the **\$2M Wildcat Philanthropic Seed Fund**, university-affiliated startups now have access to critical early-stage funding to help them survive the notorious "valley of death".

Impact That Reaches Beyond Arizona

The startups launched in 2025 illustrate just how far-reaching the impact of **University of Arizona** innovation can be. Ventures include:

- **Branch Therapeutics**- advancing new cancer therapies



These milestones show the full commercialization pipeline in action. From invention disclosures to startup launches, every stage is moving forward at a pace we've never seen before.

Doug Hockstad,
Tech Launch Arizona



UArizona inventors celebrated their 2025 patents at TLA's World IP Day on April 23, 2025.

University Moves

- **Senhponix**- developing high-fidelity wearable health monitoring
- **Kuairu**- building solar-powered towers to dry food waste
- **VerdiTx**- pioneering green-light therapy to manage pain

Each represents a fusion of deep research and entrepreneurial spirit. These technologies are designed not only to generate revenue but to change lives.

Arizona's Innovation Future

For **Tomás Díaz de la Rubia**, UArizona Senior Vice President for Research and Partnerships, the surge reflects more than just metrics.

“Transforming research into societal benefit requires more than great ideas, it demands trusted partnerships and a shared commitment to progress”, he said.

“Arizona’s momentum reflects a deep collaboration across the university and with external partners who bring discoveries to life in ways that strengthen communities, fuel economic vitality, and create lasting public value”.

Looking ahead, TLA plans to expand its focus on graduate student ventures and deep tech startups tied to the university’s research strengths.

With a record-breaking year behind it and a pipeline brimming with new discoveries, the **University of Arizona** is proving that the desert isn’t just growing talent, it’s cultivating the future.

**Have Startup News, Founder Wins,
or Funding Tips?**

Email us: info@thesiliconoasis.org



Transforming research into societal benefit requires more than great ideas; it demands trusted partnerships and a shared commitment to progress.

Tomas Diaz de la Rubia
University of Arizona



UArizona-backed Aging Health Sciences is developing a supplement to fight age-related vision loss.

WHY PHOENIX'S LOW VC PER CAPITA IS A BIG OPPORTUNITY

Phoenix lags in venture capital per person, and that's its biggest opportunity.

By Josue Romero, Managing Editor

On paper, Phoenix looks like a paradox. In 2023, startups across the Phoenix–Mesa–Scottsdale metro pulled in \$375 million in venture capital, ranking 18th among major U.S. metros. Not bad for a city still finding its voice on the national stage. But when you divide that number across the Valley's fast growing population, the math tells a different story: just \$72 per person in startup funding near the bottom of the list.

It's easy to look at that figure and see a weakness. Boulder, Colorado, with less total funding than Phoenix, attracted more than \$1,100 per resident. Austin pulled in nearly \$1,000 per person, cementing its reputation as the darling of the Sun Belt. Even Dallas–Fort Worth, with \$643 million raised, eked out a higher per capita mark than Phoenix. And yet, the Phoenix story isn't one of scarcity. It's one of resilience and opportunity.

Building More with Less

The Valley has built an innovation community with far fewer resources than its peers, and that's precisely what makes the ecosystem so compelling.



Investor Insights

Phoenix now counts more than 100,000 tech workers among its residents, many of them transplants drawn by the region's cost of living, quality of life, and rapid job growth. Pitch nights and demo days are no longer anomalies; they've become regular markers on the city's calendar. Co-working spaces buzz with early-stage founders. Local funds like **AZ-VC** and **PHX Ventures** are planting seeds, while national firms that once overlooked the desert are starting to visit more often. In other words, Phoenix has done the hard part: building the foundation.

Lessons from Boulder and Austin

Compare that to Boulder. The Colorado hub raised less total money than Phoenix in 2023, but because its startup density is so concentrated, every founder feels the impact of capital moving through the community.

Austin offers another lesson. Two decades ago, it was a mid-market tech city, not so different from Phoenix today. But as the dollars multiplied, so did the visibility. Startups grew into scale-ups, investors reinvested, and culture compounded. Phoenix hasn't reached that tipping point yet. That's the opportunity staring us in the face.

The Gap to Close

Consider the numbers side by side:

- **Boulder:** \$1,104 per person
- **Austin:** \$911 per person
- **Phoenix:** \$72 per person

The gap is wide, but it's not insurmountable. In fact, it may be the very thing that defines Phoenix's next chapter, because if the city has managed to rank in the top 20 with this level of capital, what happens when it catches up?

A Call to Action

For founders, the message is simple: keep building here. Every successful raise, every exit, every product launch adds weight to Phoenix's reputation. For investors, the moment is even clearer. A dollar in Phoenix stretches further than it does in crowded markets, and those who lean in now won't just be backing companies; they'll be shaping an ecosystem.

And for the broader community, universities, accelerators, civic leaders—the job is to amplify, connect, and showcase. Momentum exists, but capital follows visibility.

From Desert Roots to Silicon Oasis

So yes, Phoenix's per capita venture capital number looks low on a chart. But viewed differently, it's a sign of untapped potential. The desert has always been about transformation — a place where harsh conditions force growth that's both resilient and surprising.

We've already proven we can compete in raw numbers with smaller innovation hubs. We've built a tech workforce on par with cities that get twice or three times the attention. What we haven't done, yet, is unlock the multiplier effect of concentrated capital.

The question isn't whether Phoenix belongs on the map. It's whether we'll water the seeds already planted. Because when we do, the Valley won't just be another startup city. It will be the Silicon Oasis the desert has been waiting for.

Have Startup News, Founder Wins, or Funding Tips?

Email us: info@thesiliconoasis.org

SORABAN: THE AI COPILOT TRANSFORMING ACCOUNTING FIRM

Soraban helps accounting firms reclaim time and scale smarter by automating admin work.

By Josue Romero, Managing Editor

Every week, accountants spend up to 60% of their time on unbillable tasks—chasing PDFs, coordinating emails, and securing signatures. **Soraban**, an AI-powered admin system for accounting firms, is changing that. The startup just closed its **Series A** round led by **Altos Ventures**, giving firms the tools to reclaim lost hours and focus on high-value work.

From Overworked to Empowered

Most software automates tax prep. **Soraban** tackles the real productivity killer: administrative grind. Its AI integrates seamlessly with existing tools, automates client intake, document collection, workflow coordination, and final delivery—turning admins into “client superheroes.” Firms can scale efficiently without adding chaos or headcount.

Soraban’s founder, **Enoch Ko**, discovered the need firsthand while running his own S-Corporation. After saving tens of thousands in taxes through automation, he launched a tech-enabled tax firm for self-employed individuals and S-Corps.



The bigger bottleneck was always the back office. “After five tax seasons, I knew the problem: admin work was slowing every firm down,” Ko says. “**Soraban** removes that friction entirely.”

Scaling Without Chaos

“**Soraban** has been a huge upgrade from our previous system,” says **John Hopkins**, Partner at **Prospect Financial Solutions**. “Clients love how easy it is, and the automated reminders have saved us countless hours. Even after losing a key admin, we’ve been able to maintain our volume—and we’re excited to see where it goes next.”

This **Series A** validates a new category: the Admin Execution Layer. By freeing staff from repetitive tasks, **Soraban** lets teams focus on clients, increase billable work, and reduce burnout. Admins become workflow owners, clients get faster turnaround, and firms grow smarter—a glimpse of the future of accounting.

BONUS HOMES BRINGS \$65.5M INNOVATION TO PHOENIX

Homeowners can now access equity without giving up future gains, thanks to a new financial model.

By Josue Romero, Managing Editor

Imagine needing to move but having your wealth locked inside your home. For millions of Americans with low-rate mortgages, selling is the only way to access cash, meaning they walk away from future gains their property could generate.

Bonus Homes is changing that with its **Home Appreciation Partnership (HAP)**.

The program lets homeowners unlock their home equity as if they sold while still retaining a share of future appreciation.

Bonus Homes manages the property as a rental until the homeowner eventually decides to sell.

Since emerging from its pilot last year, **Bonus Homes** has built a \$20 million portfolio.

Over the next decade, it plans to scale to 10,000 homes, focusing on \$300K–\$500K properties in Arizona, Tennessee, and other select markets, giving everyday homeowners a chance to turn their largest asset into lasting wealth.



“Most homeowners today are forced to sell whenever they move, missing out on the wealth their home can create,” said **Kyle Kamrooz**, CEO of **Bonus Home**.

Backed by **\$65.5 million** in seed funding from **Solyco Capital**, **Redwood Trust**, **Nextview Ventures**, **Operate Ventures**, and **Alpaca VC**, **Bonus Homes** is planting its flag in Phoenix — a city fast becoming a hub for proptech innovation.

“Greater Phoenix’s growing startup ecosystem continues to attract high-growth, venture-backed companies,” said **Mark Paratore**, **VP of Business Development** at the Greater Phoenix Economic Council. “We’re excited to welcome this innovative platform and wealth-building tool into the Valley.”

CHAOS-PROOF: THE 4 TRAITS EVERY FOUNDER NEEDS

Thrive in startups by mastering the traits that turn chaos into opportunity.

By Heather Tugaoen, CEO, WaterGenics

In startups, chaos isn't the exception; it's the rule. Titles blur, roles shift, and the rules of the game change daily. If you can't adapt, you don't survive.

As CEO of **Watergenics**, I see this every day. Our mission is simple but ambitious: make water quality visible in real time, anytime, anywhere. By pairing rugged, easy-to-use hardware with a powerful analytics platform, we help customers manage water systems efficiently, reduce waste, and build toward a sustainable future.

Our patented sensor technology, powered by vibrational spectroscopy, delivers insights no other system can; redefining how the industry thinks about data, resilience, and control. Along the way, I've noticed that the founders who thrive share four essential traits:

Adaptability

Being agile isn't just about speed it's knowing when to pivot and leave sunk costs behind. We scrapped a prototype that wasn't working and rebuilt it in half the time because we stayed flexible.



Courage

Cold calls, skeptical investors, public launches — it all requires boldness. Startup life demands stepping into the uncomfortable, over and over. Friendly reminder: That sales call won't make itself.

Humility

Rejection isn't failure; it's feedback. The best founders actively seek it, listen, digest, and improve. Even a "no" can be a roadmap to refinement. Try this: Ask someone with more experience for advice today, and really listen.

Perseverance

Startups knock you down often. What separates founders who thrive is getting back up, staying creative, and ignoring distractions. As Aaliyah said: "If at first you don't succeed, dust yourself off and try again."

Whether you're in year one or year ten, adaptability, courage, humility, and perseverance are timeless tools in the founder toolkit. Sharpen them every day.

THE MAVERICK BEHIND ARIZONA'S STARTUPS: MEET CHRIS FOX

From athlete to entrepreneur, Chris Fox turns bold moves into lasting impact.

By Chris Fox, HR Business Consultant

Chris Fox remembers the smell of fresh-cut grass and the roar of the crowd long before he ever imagined becoming a founder.

As a teenager in Scottsdale, Arizona, he chased every tackle, every touchdown, every victory with the kind of intensity that would eventually define his life beyond sports.

By 2009, he and the **Chaparral Firebirds** had captured a state championship a moment of triumph that felt like the first chapter in a story he was still writing.

Football taught him discipline, teamwork, and resilience, but it was the lessons off the field that would shape him most. At **Utah State University**, Chris played alongside future NFL star **Bobby Wagner** and earned a scholarship for his athletic performance. Yet in his junior year, he made a choice that surprised everyone: he returned his scholarship to focus on deeper personal development and education.



“I wanted to grow beyond what anyone expected of me,” Chris reflects. “I knew the skills I needed to succeed in life weren’t only on the field.” That decision, risky and unconventional, exemplified his long-term mindset—a willingness to make bold moves for the sake of future opportunity.

Sowing the Seeds of Innovation

Chris’s first foray into entrepreneurship was a far cry from the gridiron. In 2016, he co-founded **BAMBOX Produce**, an indoor urban farming startup designed to redefine local food production. What started as a 3,500-square-foot warehouse quickly transformed into a bustling vertical farm. Each week, **BAMBOX** produced over 150 pounds of nutrient-dense produce while using 98% less water than traditional farming.

Founder Spotlight

Scaling **BAMBOX** was no small feat. He navigated operational challenges, educated the local market on indoor farming, and persevered through the global pandemic—experiences that left him with firsthand insight into the founder’s journey. “Building a startup is like growing a living organism,” Chris says. “You have to nurture it, adapt to its needs, and sometimes make hard decisions for the long-term health of the business.” **BAMBOX** became more than a company; it became a model for sustainable innovation, proving that ambition and environmental responsibility can thrive together.

Finding Balance in High-Stakes Leadership

Even as **BAMBOX** grew, Chris knew that scaling a startup wasn’t only about operations and revenue—it was about **people and mindset**.

A certified yoga instructor trained under renowned teacher **Mark Whitwell**, Chris integrated mindfulness, breathwork, and holistic wellness into his leadership. He understood that founders and their teams needed sustainable practices to avoid burnout while navigating high-pressure environments.

“Success isn’t just measured by the business you build,” Chris explains. “It’s measured by whether you’re able to lead with clarity, make deliberate choices, and stay grounded amid chaos.” His approach to leadership is as much about mental resilience as it is about financial performance, a philosophy that continues to influence how he advises startups today.

Building Founders, Not Just Companies

Chris’s experiences led him to a new frontier: equipping startups with enterprise-grade HR solutions. As an HR Tech Business Consultant at **VensureHR**, he helps founders implement systems that span payroll, benefits, compliance, and talent strategy. Leveraging **Vensure’s** global infrastructure, supporting over 300,000 employees worldwide, Chris provides startups with operational tools usually reserved for Fortune 500 companies.

For founders, this guidance is transformative. They can focus on vision, product, and growth while Chris ensures that their people operations are scalable, compliant, and strategically aligned. Investors, too, rely on him as a trusted advisor for portfolio companies, knowing that his guidance minimizes risk and positions startups for sustainable growth.

Championing Arizona’s Startup Scene

Chris’s story extends beyond individual companies. He has become a cornerstone of Arizona’s startup ecosystem, serving as Executive Director of Startup World Cup Arizona and Regional Partner for Pegasus Tech Ventures.

In 2024, he helped launch the state’s first regional competition, providing local startups a global stage. The winning company, **EarthEn**, advanced to the Grand Finale in San Francisco and returned home to launch a new venture, invest in the global winner, and sponsor the following year’s Arizona event a full-circle moment that illustrates the long-term impact of Chris’s ecosystem work.

Founder Spotlight

Through initiatives like **Freeway**, a founder-led community, and **Silicon Oasis**, a nonprofit uniting Arizona's tech ecosystem, Chris builds bridges between founders, investors, and institutions. For the **2025 Startup World Cup Arizona**, he structured a **\$100,000 SAFE investment** and a 10-month hyper-scaling program from **Open Access Ventures** for the regional winner, creating unprecedented opportunities for local founders to scale nationally and globally.

Mentorship and Giving Back

Chris's commitment to growth isn't limited to startups or HR systems; it extends to people. He mentors student founders at **Arizona State University** and participates in programs like **Techstars**, **Venture Devils**, and **StartupAZ**.

Whether coaching pitch competitions, providing strategic introductions, or sharing hard-earned lessons, Chris invests in founders the way he invests in his own ventures—with heart, strategy, and long-term vision.

"Mentorship isn't about giving instructions," he says. "It's about helping someone see possibilities they didn't see before, giving them the confidence to take the next step." Through these efforts, Chris ensures that the next generation of founders not only survives but thrives.

A Holistic Vision

What makes Chris Fox remarkable is his ability to blend ambition with empathy. From the football field to the yoga mat, from urban farming to enterprise HR consulting, his journey is a testament to intentional growth. He builds more than businesses—he builds people, teams, and community.

His philosophy is simple yet powerful: sustainable growth comes when leaders invest in themselves as much as their companies, when ecosystems are nurtured alongside individual ventures, and when success is measured not just in revenue but in impact. **Chris Fox's** work ensures that Arizona's brightest ideas have the mentorship, operational foundations, and community support to flourish—turning local talent into global innovators.

As he reflects on his journey, Chris smiles: "Every step, every risk, every choice has been about growth not just my own, but everyone I work with. If I can help others reach their potential while building something meaningful, then I know I'm doing it right."

From championship athlete to startup founder, HR innovator, mentor, and ecosystem builder, **Chris Fox** exemplifies the kind of leader who **inspires, empowers, and transforms** a true architect of Arizona's entrepreneurial future.



At ASU, he guides student founders and supports programs like Venture Devils and StartupAZ.

CHRISTINE MACKAY: SHAPING THE FUTURE OF GREATER PHOENIX

Guiding Greater Phoenix's next chapter, Christine Mackay turns vision into growth and innovation.

By Josue Romero, Managing Editor

When Christine Mackay walks through a city under transformation, she sees more than steel beams or glass towers. She sees opportunity. She sees communities reshaped, industries taking root, and a region evolving into a global powerhouse. That vision has defined her career—and now she carries it into her new role as President and CEO of the **Greater Phoenix Economic Council (GPEC)**, starting October 13, 2025.

For nearly three decades, Mackay has been at the forefront of economic development in Arizona. She spent 16 years as **Chandler's Economic Development Director** before taking on **Phoenix's Community and Economic Development Department** in 2014. There, she oversaw more than 70 staff members and a \$70 million budget, guiding initiatives that delivered \$190 billion in capital investment, and over 100,000 new jobs, and a dramatic rise in wages. Projects like **TSMC Arizona**, the state-of-the-art semiconductor facility, and the revitalization of **Park Central** demonstrate her ability to marry vision with tangible results.



Mackay led Chandler's economic development before joining Phoenix in 2014.

“Christine is a powerhouse in the region with meaningful relationships across the market and a deep understanding of our dynamic industry base and GPEC priorities,” says **Derrick Hall**, president and **CEO of the Arizona Diamondbacks** and chair of GPEC's board. “The board is confident that her experience and leadership will reinforce GPEC's strengths in positioning Greater Phoenix as a global leader for economic growth.”

Building Bridges, Driving Growth

Numbers tell part of the story but Mackay's real strength lies in her ability to connect people and ideas. Colleagues call her a “bridge-builder”: she navigates corporate boardrooms, neighborhood meetings, and international negotiations with equal skill. This skill is particularly critical for the tech and startup ecosystem.

Economic Development

Her leadership at **GPEC** promises a sharper focus on innovation clusters, workforce development, and capital attraction, creating an ecosystem where ideas can scale and stay in the Valley.

“Christine’s steadfast partnership and leadership in catalytic projects to the market has elevated Greater Phoenix to its current era of unmatched growth,” said GPEC’s Interim CEO Thomas Maynard.

Why This Matters Now

Greater Phoenix is no longer just a fast-growing city—it’s a magnet for semiconductors, bioscience, clean energy, AI, and fintech companies. Mackay’s appointment signals a strategic push to make the region a true global innovation hub.

At the same time, challenges loom: housing affordability, water security, infrastructure strain, and keeping workforce skills aligned with fast-changing industries. Mackay’s task will be balancing mega-projects with support for startups and local communities a balancing act that could define the region’s next decade.

A Vision for the Next Era

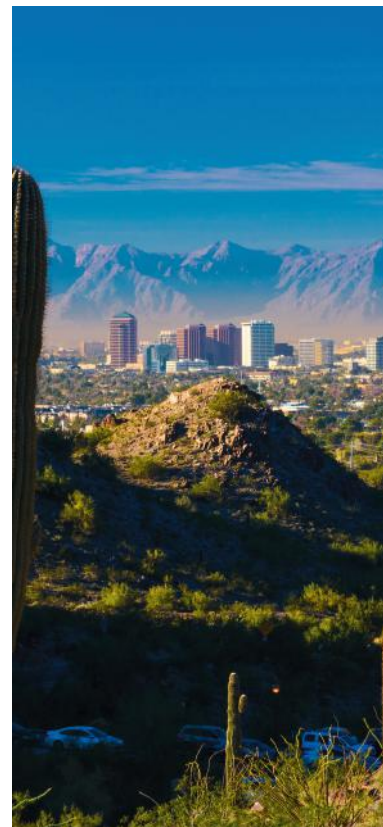
Mackay has always believed that economic development is about more than deals or buildings. Mackay said. “Throughout my career in Phoenix and Chandler, I’ve seen firsthand how powerful this region’s strengths and partnerships are.”

As she steps into **GPEC**, the Valley’s story is entering its next chapter. With her track record of turning vision into measurable results, Mackay is poised to lead Greater Phoenix from rapid growth to sustainable, globally recognized innovation—and ensure that the city’s transformation benefits both businesses and communities alike.



“Christine’s steadfast partnership and leadership in catalytic projects to the market has elevated Greater Phoenix to its current era of unmatched growth,”

Thomas Maynard
GPEC



Since 2014, Mackay has led Phoenix’s economic dev. driving \$190B in investment.

Featured Article

FROM DESERT TO DISRUPTION: ARIZONA TECH WEEK

Arizona’s first decentralized tech conference will unite founders, investors, and innovators from across the state.

By Kyle Macdonald, Editor-in-Chief

Next April, Arizona will transform into a living, moving conference hall. Investors may start their morning walking through a Queen Creek battery factory, seeing state-of-the-art EV technology in action, then head to a Tucson AI panel, and finish the day with rooftop demos and networking mixers in downtown Phoenix. Meanwhile, founders, engineers, and influencers will crisscross the state for pitch nights, innovation tours, and roundtables, experiencing Arizona’s tech ecosystem firsthand.

This is **Arizona Tech Week**, the state’s first-ever decentralized tech conference, running April 6–12, 2026. Organizers expect 25,000 participants, including 5,000 investors, 10,000 startups, and 10,000 influencers, spread across multiple cities for a week of keynotes, panels, pitch competitions, and curated Arizona experiences.

Governor Katie Hobbs, alongside the Arizona Commerce Authority (ACA) and the Arizona Venture Alliance, framed the event as a milestone:



Featured Article

“Global tech leaders are investing in Arizona because they see what we see: Arizona is the future of tech. We’ve built the foundation — world-class talent, unrivaled community, and a business climate leading the nation.”

Arizona’s Momentum

Arizona’s tech boom didn’t happen overnight. Since 2010, venture capital deals have grown 150%, and investment dollars have surged 330%, far above the national average. (PitchBook, 2025)

Major investments anchor this growth. **Intel** and **TSMC** are scaling semiconductor production in Greater Phoenix, **LG Energy Solution** is building one of North America’s largest battery plants, and a wave of AI, fintech, and climate tech startups is rapidly expanding.

Chris Camacho, former CEO of the **Greater Phoenix Economic Council**, frames the opportunity:

“We’ve had 28 suppliers come to Arizona since 2020... with abundant natural resources and a supportive ecosystem, Greater Phoenix possesses the incredible opportunity to become a global climate tech hub.”

This surge in investment isn’t just about facilities it’s about talent and connectivity. Arizona’s universities are producing top-tier engineers, while incubators and accelerators provide structured support to young founders.

Founders at the Forefront

What truly defines Arizona’s tech economy is its collaborative founder culture.

Brandon Clarke, founder of **StartupAZ**, highlights the network effect: “Recognizing early on that founders need each other is crucial... nobody knows the journey of an entrepreneur better than someone who is currently in it.”

Chris Ronzio, **CEO of Trainual**, emphasizes the ecosystem’s growth:



Global tech leaders are investing in Arizona because they see what we see: Arizona is the future of tech.

Gov. Katie Hobbs
State of Arizona



Arizona Tech Week, the state’s first-ever decentralized tech conference, launches in 2026.

Featured Article

“Together we’re building a stronger ecosystem... attracting more talent and getting more press.”

Greg Head, who tracks over 1,000 software companies through **Gregslist**, adds:

“There’s a LOT going on in the software ecosystem in Arizona... it will keep growing.”

Founders like **Hamid Shojaee (AZ Disruptors)** see Tech Week as an unprecedented chance to showcase their work on a national and global stage:

“For early-stage founders, visibility is everything. This gives startups the chance to connect directly with investors flying in from across the world,” he notes.

Heidi Jannenga, co-founder of **WebPT**, underscores the community ethos:

“Arizona’s advantage isn’t just capital or facilities, it’s how people show up for each other.”

A Distributed Festival

Arizona Tech Week isn’t just a conference — it’s a statewide innovation festival. Unlike traditional events in a single convention center, Tech Week embraces a decentralized model, with events hosted across cities, from Phoenix and Scottsdale to Tucson and Flagstaff.

The **ACA** will manage community-submitted events, allowing startups, universities, corporations, and nonprofits to host sessions that are fully integrated into the master schedule. A free RSVP management platform ensures smooth coordination for hosts and attendees alike.

Participants will be able to customize their journey, filtering by city, industry, or topic. One attendee could tour a semiconductor fab in the morning, join a fintech panel in the afternoon, and cap the day with a climate tech networking dinner in Phoenix.

Sandra Watson, ACA President and CEO, captures the vision:

“From next-gen technologies like AI and automated vehicles to North America’s most advanced microchip factories, Arizona isn’t just keeping pace with the future — we’re shaping it.”

What to Expect

Tech Week promises more than panels and presentations. Attendees can expect:

- **Hands-on innovation tours:** State-of-the-art semiconductor and battery plants.
- **Exclusive founder pitches:** A curated stage for early-stage startups to present to investors.
- **Networking events and mixers:** Rooftop panels, happy hours, and roundtables in multiple cities.
- **Educational workshops:** From AI and blockchain to climate tech and fintech applications.

This multi-dimensional approach mirrors how Arizona’s tech ecosystem operates in real life collaborative, distributed, and community-driven.

The Stakes

For founders, Tech Week offers visibility. For investors, deal flow. For the state, a chance to prove it belongs on the global stage, alongside Austin, Denver, and Silicon Valley. If the week succeeds, it won’t just be a conference. It will mark the moment Arizona transitioned from a rising star to a recognized tech hub.

MEET OUR AMBASSADORS



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Privv



Ryan Moorehouse
Ruck



Jason Beck
Kraus- Anderson



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ImageAid



Kyle Desousa
Koko Ni



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Navi Nurses



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Get to know the builders, storytellers, and connectors powering the Silicon Oasis movement behind the scenes.



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“ We’re not just building stories — we’re building the community behind them. Every event, every article, every founder feature is powered by people who believe in Arizona’s future. ”



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