

Silicon Oasis + inversionAZ

Organizations Join Forces to Drive
Innovation in Arizona



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Silicon Oasis + inversionAZ

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR EDITOR



Kyle Macdonald
Editor-in-Chief,
Silicon Oasis

As we publish our March 2026 issue, it's clear that Arizona's startup ecosystem is entering a new phase—one defined not by potential, but by alignment. This issue captures that shift.

Across founders, investors, operators, and institutions, we're seeing something different take shape: a more connected, more deliberate, and more resilient innovation community.

The stories in these pages reflect real momentum—builders solving meaningful problems, capital moving with intention, and infrastructure forming to support long-term growth.

At the center of that momentum is a defining milestone for our ecosystem: the official merger between Silicon Oasis and InvisionAZ.

This partnership represents more than a collaboration—it's a structural step toward unifying Arizona's fragmented innovation landscape into a single, founder-led platform with statewide reach and credibility.

And this is just the beginning. On April 24, we will bring that vision to life at the Silicon Oasis Summit. This event is designed to convene the people shaping Arizona's future—founders, investors, operators, and leaders—under one roof to align on what comes next. It's not just a gathering; it's a signal of where we're going.

Arizona has always had the talent, the ambition, and the opportunity. Now, we're building the platform to match it. We're just getting started.

Kyle Macdonald
Co-Founder, Silicon Oasis



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.



THE SILICON OASIS AND INVISIONAZ MERGER

Silicon Oasis Initiative and InvisionAZ today announced the completion of a strategic merger, forming Arizona’s leading privately led, founder-driven technology ecosystem organization.

The merger, officially completed on February 20, 2026, establishes a unified statewide platform designed to connect founders, investors, operators, and institutions while accelerating the growth of Arizona’s innovation economy. Silicon Oasis has emerged as a grassroots, founder-led movement built from within Arizona’s startup community, focused on connecting builders, operators, and investors through media, events, and direct engagement.

In contrast, InvisionAZ has played a critical role in advancing statewide policy, economic development, and large-scale ecosystem initiatives. Together, the organizations bring both bottom-up community energy and top-down strategic influence, creating a more complete and coordinated platform to support Arizona’s innovation economy.



Historically, Arizona’s technology ecosystem has operated in fragmented pockets, often led by institutions rather than the founders building companies. This merger represents a structural shift — placing entrepreneurs, operators, and investors at the center of ecosystem leadership.

The combined organization will operate under the Silicon Oasis Initiative brand, serving as the central hub for Arizona’s technology community with a focus on coordination, credibility, and long-term momentum. “This is about building the connective tissue Arizona has been missing,” said Kyle Macdonald, CEO of Silicon Oasis. “We have the talent, capital, and companies — now we have the platform to unify them.”

Silicon Oasis Community

The organization will drive impact through four core priorities: policy engagement to support initiatives that strengthen Arizona’s environment for innovation; resource deployment to connect founders with capital, talent, and mentorship; ecosystem connectivity to link founders, investors, corporations, and institutions statewide; and communications and visibility to elevate Arizona through media, storytelling, and events.

Silicon Oasis will execute this vision through a structured ecosystem model that includes industry pillars such as AI, defense, semiconductor, software, healthtech, and cleantech, alongside founder-led programming, strategic partnerships, and a unified media platform.

Flagship initiatives will include the Silicon Oasis Summit, Silicon Oasis Pitch Nights, Arizona Tech Week collaborations, and recurring ecosystem-wide events

Register for the Silicon Oasis Summit!



The Silicon Oasis Initiative is guided by a distinguished Board of Directors comprised of leading founders, executives, investors, and public-private leaders:

- Jack Selby, Chair — General Partner at Copper Sky Capital; former PayPal executive and investor at Thiel Capital.
- Ernie Garcia Jr. — Founder & CEO of Carvana; former Treasurer of DriveTime
- John Ragan, Vice Chair — CEO of InvisionAZ; former President & CEO of the Arizona Chamber of Commerce
- Aaron Matos — Founder & Executive Chairman of Paradox; former founder of Jobing.com and Recruiting.com
- John J. Donahoe — CEO & Co-Owner, Positive Recovery Solutions Holdings (PRS), Founder and Former CEO, National Imaging Associates
- Clate Mask — CEO of PHX FWD, former CEO of Keap (Infusionsoft)
- Dennis Dahlen — CFO of Mayo Clinic; former CFO of Banner Health
- Andy Lombard — CEO of Tesoro.vc; former Executive VP at the Arizona Commerce Authority
- Jerry Coleman — Co-founder of Offerpad; formerly Invitation Homes, Elevation Solar, Build to Stay
- Gregg Scoresby — Founder PHX FWD, PHX Ventures; former Founder & CEO of CampusLogic
- Chris Camacho —SVP Global Strategy of Axon; former President & CEO of GPEC
- Steven Pidgeon — Managing Partner at DLA Piper; led \$50B+ in M&A, securities, and private equity transactions
- Jeff Guldner — Former Chairman & CEO of APS/Pinnacle West; board member at Duke Energy
- Sandra Watson — President & CEO of the Arizona Commerce Authority
- Steve Brown — Founder & CEO of Trinity Capital; 30+ years in venture finance
- Michael DiMaria — Partner at Total Spectrum; former executive at Cox and AT&T

Silicon Oasis Community

The long-term vision of Silicon Oasis is to position Phoenix and the broader Arizona market as a globally recognized innovation hub, driven by founders, investors, and operators building the future of the state. By aligning leadership, capital, and community under one platform, the organization aims to accelerate company formation, attract investment, and retain top talent in Arizona.

The Silicon Oasis Initiative is a nonprofit organization dedicated to uniting Arizona's startup ecosystem through media, events, and strategic infrastructure. The organization connects founders, investors, and operators to drive innovation and economic growth across the state.

Get Involved:

To stay connected with Arizona's rapidly growing technology ecosystem, readers are invited to subscribe to the Silicon Oasis News Network for weekly updates, insights, and founder stories, and to explore the Silicon Oasis Magazine for deeper coverage of the people, companies, and trends shaping the state.



Founders, investors, and community leaders are also encouraged to register for the upcoming [Silicon Oasis Summit](#), where Arizona's innovation community will come together to share ideas, build relationships, and help shape the future of the ecosystem.

Register for the Silicon Oasis Summit!



PHX ANGELS TAKES FLIGHT

A Midwest-meets-desert origin story fuels what could become the Valley's most consequential angel network

Phoenix has long been known for its sun, its sprawl, and its real estate cycles. But a quieter story has been building in the background—one of software founders, operator angels, and a growing conviction that the Valley is ready to stand alongside Austin, Denver, and Miami as a genuine technology hub.

The official launch of PHX Angels is the latest and most organized expression of that ambition. The network arrives with serious pedigree. PHX Angels absorbed Spark Angels, a pre-seed and seed-focused investor community, consolidating capital, deal flow, and mentorship capacity under one roof.

The merger brings together three co-founders—Jessica Pacheco, Corey Ferengul, and Marc Kiven—each carrying decades of operational and investment experience, now channeling it squarely into the Valley.

A Founding Team Forged by Operator Instinct

The origin story reads like a startup founding memo. Ferengul, an accomplished angel investor from



Chicago with more than 80 direct startup investments and multiple software exits under his belt, recognized Arizona's untapped potential. He brought that perspective to Kiven—an ASU alumnus, Signal founder, and veteran of Right Media (acquired by Yahoo), aQuantive, and Centro—who had recently relocated to Phoenix. Kiven's immediate response: "You need to meet Jessica."

Pacheco brings over 22 years of executive experience from a Fortune 500 energy company, including VP roles in Corporate Development and State and Local Affairs. She also co-founded Bedrock innovation incubator, serves as a founder and senior leader at AZ-VC—Arizona's largest venture capital fund—and advises growth capital providers tailored to founders' unique needs.

Silicon Oasis Community

Why It Matters in Arizona's Rising Ecosystem Under the unified PHX Angels banner, the trio transitions to Venture Partner and advisor roles while Aaron Favreau steps in as Executive Director to lead deal flow and day-to-day strategy.

Clate Mask, founder of Keap (formerly Infusionsoft) and one of Arizona's most prominent SaaS entrepreneurs, joins as Entrepreneur in Residence—a signal that the network is serious about operator-led mentorship, not just capital deployment.

The investment thesis is deliberately focused: software startups with early sales traction (targeting ~\$100K ARR), primarily Phoenix-based companies—though open to strong U.S. teams nationwide—led by founders with grit and real growth potential.

What distinguishes PHX Angels from earlier local networks is its structural alignment with PHX FWD, Phoenix's fast-growing community of builders and operators.

Investors gain early access to top startups while founders benefit from hands-on support and a network of over 1,000 builders—a flywheel designed to generate both returns and ecosystem density simultaneously.

Arizona's momentum is real: surging AI infrastructure, top national rankings for founder-friendliness, and a growing wave of local capital. PHX Angels is built to accelerate all of it. The stated goal is bold but increasingly plausible: position Phoenix as a top U.S. software hub by 2035.

Head to phxangels.com to pitch, join as an investor, or learn more. In the Silicon Desert, momentum builds one funded startup at a time—don't miss what's coming next.



Register for the Silicon Oasis Summit!



BUILDERS GET THEIR SHOT

Arizona Nerd Network and University of Silicon Valley Partner to Open a New Door for Creators, Tinkerers, and Technical Talent

In Phoenix's fast-growing tech scene, the most important work often happens quietly — in meetups, in Discord threads, in garages where someone is building something no one asked them to build. The Arizona Nerd Network exists for those people. And now, through a new partnership with the University of Silicon Valley (USV), it's offering them something tangible: a direct pathway to education, credentials, and hands-on technical training.

The initiative is led by two community builders whose backgrounds couldn't be more complementary. **Don Fotsch, co-founder of AZNN**, brings a career that spans Apple, PayPal, and AOL — where he held VP and GM roles across product, design, and consumer technology — before turning his attention to Arizona's builder community.

The Nerd Network he helped build has grown into an organically assembled, word-of-mouth community of over 500 entrepreneurs and tech minds coming together to help startups scale. It's not a



startup, not a fund, and not a typical meetup group. It's something in between: an underground movement building real camaraderie among Arizona's founders and problem-solvers.

Sami Mian brings a different kind of depth. An assistant teaching professor at ASU's Polytechnic School, his information technology focus spans robotics, AI, mechatronics, UAV systems, Internet of Things, and smart cities.

He's an entrepreneur and researcher who has served as CTO of a drone startup, mentored in FIRST Robotics competitions since 2010, and advised on emerging technology policy at local and national levels. Together, Fotsch and Mian built AZNN as the kind of community that makes a region's tech ecosystem actually work — not just for those already in the room, but for those trying to find the door.

Silicon Oasis Community

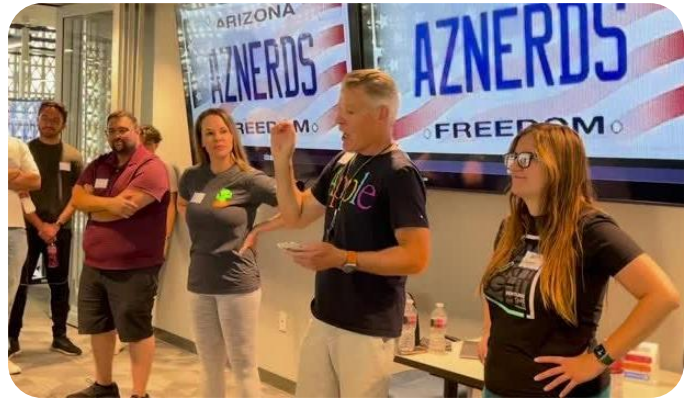
A Scholarship Built for the Overlooked

The new scholarship program is designed specifically for AZNN members who are actively building, creating, and solving real-world problems — the people who often fall outside traditional academic pipelines despite having the drive and capability to thrive.

Through this partnership, students will gain hands-on experience building real products, working on real projects, and engaging directly with companies. The model is straightforward: talent is everywhere, and access to education should follow it.

USV is a fitting partner for this mission. Established in 1887 as California's first technical college, USV describes itself as a university for creators and entrepreneurs — project-driven, student-focused, and career-ready, with students launching companies and building products before they graduate.

The university already offers a **Max Achievement Scholarship of up to \$15,000 per year** that recognizes mastery in digital gaming environments, treating persistence and systems thinking as legitimate academic credentials. The AZNN partnership carries exactly the same spirit.



Why It Matters in Arizona's Rising Ecosystem

For Arizona entrepreneurs, the implications are immediate and real. A builder in AZNN can now pursue structured education while staying embedded in the community — gaining credentials, technical skills, and a network simultaneously. Programs like this reinforce that the Silicon Desert's next generation of talent won't all come from the same zip codes or traditional pathways.

Arizona's momentum is real: data centers are booming, AI infrastructure is scaling, and nonprofits and grassroots organizations like Silicon Oasis and AZNN are quietly doing the connective tissue work that sustains an ecosystem long after the announcements fade. This scholarship is a microcosm of what's making the Silicon Desert thrive — one builder at a time.

Register for the Silicon Oasis Summit!



A CONVERSATION WITH PRASHANT KONDLE

For Prashant, innovation has never been about the title. It has always been about the system and how to run better.

From Hyderabad to Tempe, Through the Factory Floor Prashant Kondle did not arrive in Arizona chasing a startup dream. He arrived at Arizona State University to study industrial engineering — and what he found there shaped everything that followed.

As a graduate research student, he worked on a computational algorithm that deconstructed text into conceptual maps, generating visual frameworks of themes from raw language. It was his first real encounter with the power of building systems from the ground up. That engineering instinct — how do we make this faster, leaner, more efficient — became the through line connecting a career that has since taken him across continents, industries, and organizational scales.

He co-founded an early healthcare technology company building sophisticated physician practice management solutions. He ran a business



analytics program across 878 locations at Goldman Sachs. He served as Chief Business Officer for a social venture in India, growing sustainable livelihoods across a supply chain of over 100,000 artisans by 35% in two years. Each chapter was different in context, identical in philosophy: find the inefficiency, engineer the solution, measure the real outcome.

Today, that philosophy is being applied to one of the most complex and consequential environments in the world — aerospace and defense manufacturing.

Founder Spotlight

A Recognized Voice at the Intersection of AI and Regulation

Prashant is a senior technology and product leader whose expertise has been recognized at the highest levels of his industry.

He is an IEEE Senior Member and an active contributor to the Aerospace Industries Association, where he serves on both the Engineering Management Committee and the AI Working Group — collaborating with industry peers on emerging technology adoption, policy frameworks, and best practices for deploying AI in regulated environments.

He is also a Forbes Technology Council member and published author, with articles featured across professional and industry forums covering AI-native enterprise transformation, supply chain resilience, and compliance automation.

His most recent Forbes piece, "Digital Transformation Is Dead — It's Time For AI-Driven Reinvention," made a direct and provocative case: incremental modernization is no longer sufficient. Organizations must now architect for AI-native operating models from the ground up. The piece generated significant engagement, drawing outreach from CEOs and policy advisors who recognized it as a practical reframing of a conversation the industry had been having in circles for years.

His next publication goes further.



Prashant is in the final stages of editing a meta-framework titled "Clearing the Path for AI-Assisted Systems in Regulated Industries: From Explainability to Regulatory-Grade Assurance." At its core, the paper introduces the AI Evidence Pack — a structured, audit-ready assurance construct designed to operationalize explainable AI into defensible, regulator-grade documentation.

It provides end-to-end traceability across prompts, models, and datasets; formalized data lineage and governance controls; validation benchmarks; and immutable audit logs spanning the full AI lifecycle. The goal, as Prashant frames it, is straightforward: move AI from experimental capability to certifiable system.

Where AI Meets the Shop Floor

That publication is not academic abstraction — it is a direct extension of the problems Prashant works on every day. A Boeing 777 is assembled from hundreds of thousands of parts, manufactured across the globe, each subject to rigorous certification, traceability, and sign-off requirements. The engineers who validate those components carry fifteen to twenty years of hard-earned expertise.

A mistake is not a bad line of code that can be patched

Founder Spotlight

overnight — it is a potential catastrophe measured in lives and liability.

AI adoption in aerospace and defense is therefore slow and deliberate by design. Prashant sees AI's role not as a replacement for experienced engineers but as a systematic error-detection layer — capable of analyzing whether all 200 specifications for a part were faithfully translated at every stage of the supply chain, or whether two of them quietly fell through the cracks over a decade of handoffs.

In a world where humans consistently make mistakes under pressure and complexity, that kind of automated oversight carries enormous operational and regulatory value.

Arizona's Aerospace Opportunity — and Its Gap Arizona, Prashant argues, has genuine structural advantages in aerospace and defense: predictable climate, abundant land, no major natural disaster risk, and a growing concentration of anchor companies including Intel, TSMC, and Axon. The raw ingredients are here. What is missing is the capital infrastructure to match.

He calls for major Arizona-based companies to develop dedicated venture arms seeding local startups in aerospace, defense, manufacturing, and supply chain technology — making that capital visible and vocal enough to attract and retain the talent that currently migrates elsewhere. He also flags an underappreciated opportunity in ASU's new medical school and its engineering-for-

physicians track, but is candid: equipping people with entrepreneurial skills without building the ecosystem to receive them is handing someone a map with no roads.

What He Looks for in a Founder — And What He Brings to Oasis Capital As an Advisory Board member for Oasis Capital, Prashant will support portfolio companies on product strategy, enterprise readiness, and go-to-market execution — with particular focus on helping early-stage founders navigate regulated markets and build scalable, defensible platforms.

His standard for founders is demanding by design: he looks not for industry credentials but for depth of thinking, resilience under criticism, and the ability to defend an idea when challenged from ten different directions — advice distilled from over a decade of advising early-stage startups and watching too many promising ideas collapse under the first real stress test.

He will also contribute to deal evaluation through technical and market diligence, and his closing counsel to any founder remains deceptively simple: talk to everyone, take every criticism before you ask anyone to pay, and understand that what someone loves and what someone will consistently pay for are two entirely different things — a distinction, he believes, that separates builders who last from those who don't. He does not call himself an entrepreneur. He calls himself someone who makes processes more efficient, measured in real outcomes — from artisan supply chains to aerospace compliance platforms to government AI policy — and that, more than any title, is exactly what Arizona's ecosystem needs more of.

JASMINE BHATTI HONORED BY INC. 500

Jasmine Bhatti, RN — Founder and CEO of Navi Nurses — has been named a 2026 Inc. 500 Female Founder Honoree, a national recognition that highlights her leadership in healthcare innovation and her company’s growing impact.

Bhatti founded Navi Nurses with a clear objective: to bring personalized, concierge-level nursing care directly into patients’ homes. The model addresses a persistent gap in traditional healthcare delivery — particularly for patients navigating recovery, chronic conditions, or complex care needs outside of hospital settings.

Since its founding, Navi Nurses has scaled rapidly, positioning itself at the intersection of healthcare accessibility and patient-centered care.

The company provides licensed nursing professionals who deliver in-home services ranging from post-operative support to ongoing health management, offering an alternative to fragmented or institutional care pathways.



The company’s growth reflects broader shifts within the healthcare system, where demand for home-based care continues to rise. Factors including hospital capacity constraints, an aging population, and increasing patient preference for at-home treatment have accelerated interest in models that extend care beyond clinical environments.

Bhatti’s approach emphasizes continuity and personalization — two areas often cited as shortcomings in traditional systems. By focusing on tailored care plans and consistent nurse-patient relationships, Navi Nurses aims to improve both outcomes and overall patient experience.

Founder Spotlight

Industry observers note that concierge and in-home care models have historically been associated with high-cost, niche services. However, companies like Navi Nurses are working to expand access while maintaining quality, positioning themselves as a scalable solution to broader system inefficiencies.

Bhatti's recognition by Inc. underscores not only the company's growth but also the increasing visibility of women founders in healthcare and technology-driven sectors. The Inc. 500 Female Founder list highlights entrepreneurs who are building high-growth businesses while addressing meaningful challenges across industries.

In addition to her role as a founder, Bhatti is actively involved in Arizona's startup ecosystem as a Silicon Oasis Ambassador. In that capacity, she supports initiatives focused on connecting founders, investors, and operators across the state, contributing to a more coordinated and visible innovation environment.

Her dual role as both a company builder and ecosystem contributor reflects a broader trend within Arizona's startup community — one where founders are not only scaling businesses but also investing time and resources into strengthening the local network.



Arizona is emerging as a hub for healthcare and health tech innovation, driven by population growth, institutional support, and evolving patient needs. Navi Nurses reflects this shift, delivering practical, patient-centered solutions that address real gaps in care delivery. Bhatti's clinical background as a registered nurse directly informs the company's model, strengthening both its credibility and adoption in a highly regulated industry.

Her recognition comes as Arizona founders gain increasing national attention across high-impact sectors, particularly those rooted in real-world services and infrastructure.

ABLEMKR: REWRITING THE SKILLED LABOR PLAYBOOK

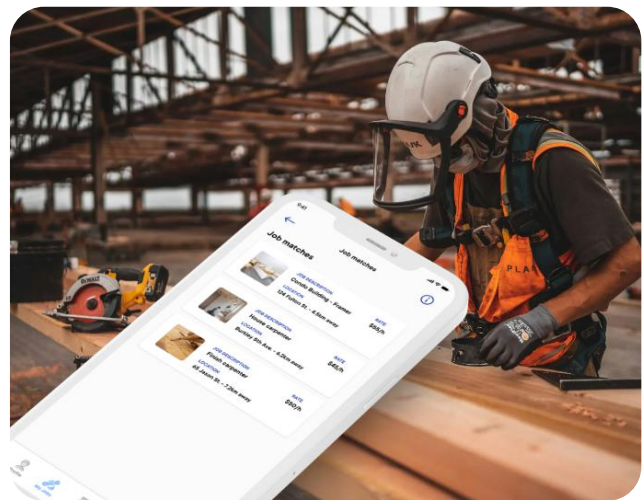
Tempe-based startup connecting craft workers with the companies that need them.

Phoenix's labor tech scene is gaining a quiet contender. ABLEMKR, a Tempe-based workforce marketplace, has emerged as one of Arizona's most compelling startups tackling one of the construction and energy industries' most persistent challenges: connecting employers with skilled craft workers efficiently, transparently, and at scale.

While the company has operated without the fanfare of a big venture announcement, its results are beginning to speak loudly enough on their own.

The Problem Is Bigger Than Most Realize

The skilled labor shortage in America's construction sector is not a temporary disruption — it is a structural crisis. The Associated Builders and Contractors estimates the industry needs to attract approximately 349,000 net new workers in 2026 alone just to meet current demand, with that number projected to climb to 456,000 by 2027. The Home Builders Institute quantifies the annual cost of the shortage at \$10.8 billion — measured in



delayed projects, higher carrying costs, and tens of thousands of homes that never get built. Meanwhile, non-senior construction roles are experiencing turnover rates exceeding 18%, compounding the challenge of retaining the workers companies do manage to hire.

Built From the Industry, For the Industry

ABLEMKR was founded by Patrick Wallain, a third-generation builder who understood firsthand how broken the traditional staffing model had become. Workers fell through cracks. Agencies operated as black boxes. Costs were opaque and timelines unreliable. Wallain, alongside CTO Dan Rivett, set out to build something the industry had never quite seen — a mobile-first marketplace that gives employers

Startup Spotlight

direct control over their hiring pipeline, from browsing verified worker profiles to managing timecards and onboarding entirely within the app.

Three Ways to Work, One Platform

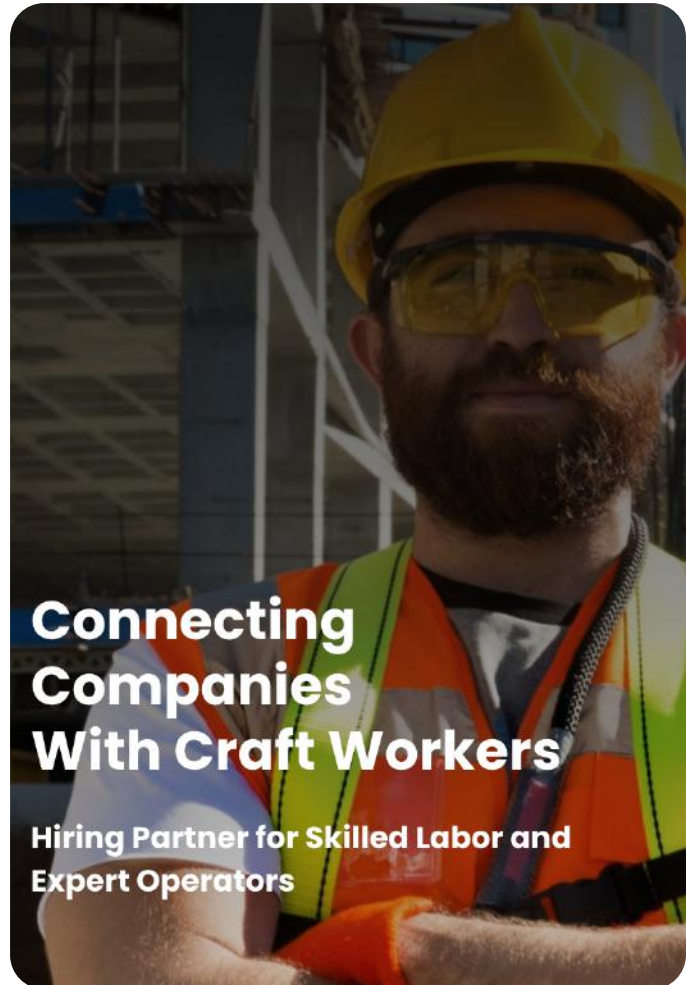
ABLEMKR operates across three integrated service lines. As a staffing provider, it vets and interviews candidates to each customer's specifications, ensuring the right people are matched to the right roles every time.

As a fractional HR partner, it steps in when internal teams struggle to fill hard-to-find positions — functioning as an extension of the employer's own workforce function. And as a full workforce management platform, it delivers real-time accountability tools for both workers and employers, replacing the phone calls, paper timesheets, and guesswork that define traditional hiring.

Transparent Pricing in an Opaque Industry

One of ABLEMKR's sharpest differentiators is its approach to cost. Rather than hiding fees inside inflated hourly markups, the company offers monthly subscription rates paired with reduced hourly worker pricing — alongside standard rate options for employers with more occasional hiring needs.

In an industry long accustomed to cost surprises, that clarity is not just a marketing angle. It is a fundamental shift in how the



employer-worker relationship is structured. A Milestone Year In January 2026, ABLEMKR announced it had doubled its revenue in 2025, surpassing 100 customers across North America. Its marketplace now connects thousands of vetted craft workers with employers across commercial construction, oil and gas, mining, and restoration sectors — including some accounts with workforces exceeding 3,000 employees.

Growth has been fueled not by aggressive cold outreach but by repeat business and referrals, a signal that the platform is delivering real, measurable results on the job site.

A Team Built to Scale Behind ABLEMKR's momentum is

Startup Spotlight



a leadership team that spans construction, technology, finance, and regional market development. At the top, President and CEO Patrick Wallain brings the credibility of a third-generation builder — someone who has lived the inefficiencies the platform is designed to solve.

CTO Dan Rivett architects the technology strategy underpinning the marketplace, while Chris Peterson, VP of Operations, drives the go-to-market execution that has powered ABLEMKR's geographic expansion across the U.S. and Canada. Kevin Grzybowski leads marketing efforts, and Leslie Peterson manages the financial infrastructure that keeps the growing operation on solid footing.

On the ground, ABLEMKR has invested heavily in regional expertise rather than centralized sales. Ray Colbeck serves as Account Manager, while a growing roster of market-embedded Account Executives — including Logen Petredis in Texas, Dace Miller in

Colorado, Brandon Dorn in Tennessee, Pat Briody in Arizona, and Amir (AJ) Javid covering Canada — ensures the company speaks the language of each local market it serves. Recruitment Specialist Josh Field rounds out the team, keeping the worker-side of the marketplace well-stocked with vetted talent.

It is a deliberately built bench, designed not just for where ABLEMKR is today, but for the scale it is clearly chasing.

Arizona's Industrial Startup to Watch

As a Tempe-rooted company operating in one of America's fastest-growing metros, ABLEMKR represents the kind of high-impact, industry-native venture that Arizona's startup ecosystem is becoming increasingly known for. The construction and energy industries powering the state's growth need exactly what ABLEMKR is building.

The company, for its part, shows every sign of building it for the long run — with the receipts to prove it.

IDEAFUNDING 2026 HIGHLIGHTS TUCSON GROWTH

Tucson pitch competition highlights Arizona's expanding startup pipeline.

Arizona's startup ecosystem continues to gain momentum, with IdeaFunding 2026 awarding more than \$50,000 to emerging companies in Tucson and reinforcing the state's growing pipeline of early-stage innovation.

Hosted by Startup Tucson in partnership with the University of Arizona Center for Innovation, the annual pitch competition brought together 19 startups competing across both technology and creative tracks. The event culminated at the historic Rialto Theatre, where finalists presented their ventures to a panel of judges, investors, and community leaders.

The competition highlighted a diverse range of solutions, spanning sectors such as healthcare infrastructure, sustainable materials, food innovation, and speech-language technology. The breadth of industries represented reflects the evolving nature of Arizona's startup ecosystem, which is increasingly characterized by applied, real-world innovation.



Top honors at this year's event included \$10,000 awards for Carbeniumtec and Intelligent Clinical Systems, both of which demonstrated strong potential within their respective fields. In addition to the primary awards, several specialty prizes were distributed to support startups addressing challenges in climate technology, food systems, and healthcare accessibility.

For participating founders, the value of IdeaFunding extends beyond prize capital. The competition serves as a platform for visibility, providing early-stage companies with exposure to investors, mentors, and ecosystem partners. It also creates pathways into incubation and acceleration programs, particularly through the University of Arizona Center for Innovation, which plays a central role in supporting commercialization efforts across the region.

Event Recap

Now in its third decade, IdeaFunding has established itself as one of Arizona’s longest-running startup competitions. Over the years, it has helped launch and scale numerous companies, contributing to the broader development of the state’s entrepreneurial landscape. Its continued presence signals both consistency and growth within Arizona’s early-stage ecosystem.

The 2026 event also underscored a notable geographic shift. While Phoenix has traditionally served as the focal point for startup activity in the state, Tucson is increasingly emerging as a complementary hub. Anchored by the University of Arizona and supported by local organizations like Startup Tucson, the city is building a reputation as a center for research-driven and community-supported innovation.

This regional diversification is becoming a defining characteristic of Arizona’s growth. As more founders build outside of traditional urban cores, the ecosystem is expanding in both scale and accessibility. Events like IdeaFunding play a critical role in this process, creating localized opportunities while maintaining connections to the broader statewide network.

The presence of both technology and creative tracks within the competition also reflects a more inclusive approach to entrepreneurship. By supporting ventures across different disciplines, IdeaFunding is helping to foster a wider range of ideas and business models, many of which address practical challenges within local and regional markets.



For Silicon Oasis, developments like IdeaFunding 2026 represent an important piece of the larger ecosystem. As Arizona’s innovation economy grows, the ability to identify, support, and connect early-stage founders across multiple cities will be essential to sustaining long-term momentum. With continued investment in founder support, access to capital, and regional collaboration, Arizona is positioning itself as a more coordinated and dynamic environment for startups. IdeaFunding’s ongoing success is a clear example of how localized initiatives can contribute to a broader, statewide movement.

As Tucson continues to build its presence within the ecosystem, events like IdeaFunding are helping shape the next generation of Arizona founders — and expanding the map of where innovation happens in the state.

FIVE FOUNDERS. ONE ROOM. PITCH NIGHT.

Arizona's early-stage startup community joined for an evening of bold ideas and real investor dialogue.

Silicon Oasis doesn't just talk about building Arizona's startup ecosystem — it engineers the moments where that ecosystem comes alive. The Silicon Oasis x MatCap Pitch Night, held on Wednesday, March 25th at Loloft in Phoenix, was exactly that kind of moment. Founders, investors, operators, and community builders filled the room for an evening centered around five carefully selected startups, each stepping up to share not just what they're building, but the deeper conviction driving their work.

The Partnership Behind the Evening

The collaboration with MatCap brought sharp focus to the event's purpose. MatCap, the Arizona-based venture advisory firm led by investor Mat Sherman, has built its model around a single core insight: early-stage fundraising is a relationship game, and most founders simply don't have the relationships yet.

MatCap works to change that — connecting emerging founders with experienced operators, peer communities, and investor networks through warm introductions, curated events, and a founder directory built on genuine trust.



For an event like Pitch Night, that philosophy translated into a room that wasn't just full of people, but full of the right people — investors and advisors who came with the intent to engage, not just observe.

Selfmadee — Jaron Lodge Jaron Lodge took the stage first with Selfmadee, an AI-powered business intelligence platform built specifically for Amazon sellers. In a market where third-party sellers increasingly live or die by data — pricing signals, competitor tracking, inventory forecasting, advertising efficiency — Selfmadee is positioning itself as the intelligence layer that turns noise into

Event Recap

actionable decisions. The e-commerce tools market is enormous and fragmented, and Lodge's pitch made the case that AI-native, seller-focused platforms represent the next evolution in how merchants compete on the world's largest retail marketplace.

Clean AI Labs — Tejas Gupta

Tejas Gupta presented Clean AI Labs, a sustainability-focused technology venture with roots in a HackHarvard 2025 winning project — a sustainability scoring API for commercial buildings that can analyze any neighborhood and identify which storefronts are energy-inefficient and how much they're wasting.

The pitch spoke to a growing market reality: as cities and corporations face mounting pressure to decarbonize, the tools that make energy inefficiency visible and addressable will become increasingly valuable. Gupta's early traction and technical foundation made for one of the evening's more technically rigorous presentations.

Morphos AI — Aram Chavez

Aram Chavez brought Morphos AI to the stage — a company operating at the intersection of artificial intelligence and adaptive systems. While early in its public-facing journey, Morphos AI drew strong audience interest for its technical approach to building AI systems that can adjust and evolve based on changing inputs, a capability with broad



applications across enterprise, healthcare, and operational environments. Chavez's confident command of the material and articulate vision for the company's long-term trajectory kept the room locked in from start to finish.

UGenome AI — Dr. Zachary S. Dr. Zachary S. Brooks brought one of the evening's most substantive pitches to the stage with UGenome AI — a Tucson-born, University of Arizona-rooted biotech software company on a mission to make genomic medicine personal, accessible, and clinically actionable.

UGenome's core technology was originally developed by UArizona doctoral student Adam Grant inside the Cancer Biology Program, built around probabilistic networks that generate drug response models by targeting the 0.1% of human genetics that makes each patient unique — the precise variation that determines whether a therapy works brilliantly for one person and fails entirely for another.

The company's SaaS suite includes ProPEX for precision pharmacogenetic prescribing reports, MAXX for individualized reference genome building in oncology research, and Seq4Life, currently in development. Their operating philosophy — "sequence once, analyze often"

Event Recap



— reflects a practical vision for reducing the cost and friction of genomic medicine at scale.

Brooks is no first-time founder. UGenome AI is his fifth technology startup, with prior ventures spanning financial services, digital authentication, and pathogen detection. He has raised \$4 million to date, recently secured investment from Tech Launch Arizona's philanthropic Evergreen Fund, and has built strategic partnerships with PlexusDX, Lincoln Health, and Jura Health across precision medicine and rare disease research.

GitHired — Raghav Bansal Raghav Bansal closed the evening with GitHired, a technical hiring platform designed to cut through the noise of traditional recruiting by evaluating engineers based on actual output — real GitHub activity, code quality, project complexity, and tech stack depth — rather than résumés or self-reported skills.

In an era where engineering talent is scarce, expensive, and notoriously difficult to evaluate accurately, GitHired's proof-of-work approach offers hiring teams a fundamentally more reliable signal. MatCap is already listed among GitHired's users, adding a layer of local credibility to Bansal's pitch.

What the Room Felt Like

Beyond the individual pitches, what defined the evening was the quality of the conversation that followed each presentation. Attendees asked sharp questions. Investors leaned in. Founders connected with each other between sets.

That texture — the informal exchange happening in parallel with the formal program — is precisely what Silicon Oasis has worked to cultivate through its growing series of community events. Pitch Night is not a showcase. It is a catalyst.

What Comes Next Events like this one are becoming a defining rhythm for Arizona's innovation community. With the Silicon Oasis Annual Summit on the horizon and MatCap continuing to expand its founder network across the state, the infrastructure for serious early-stage company building in Arizona has never been more robust.

The five founders who took the stage on March 25th are ones to watch — and the community that showed up to watch them is exactly why Arizona keeps producing companies worth following.

MLB PLAYERS TRUST EVENT IN PHOENIX

An event that proved sports can be one of the most powerful engines for youth opportunity.

A Legacy 30 Years in the Making

The MLB Players Trust doesn't operate like a typical sports charity. Founded in 1996 as a vehicle for Major League Baseball players to come together as one team — using their collective voice and resources to drive meaningful, sustainable change — the Trust has spent three decades weaving sports, education, and community into a single mission.

In 2026, the organization marks its 30th anniversary, and its Phoenix event served as a vivid reminder of why that mission still resonates. Silicon Oasis was on the ground to cover the day's conversations, capture the stories, and introduce our readers to the builders and organizations shaping what comes next.

Jonathon Chambless: The Connector in the Room One of the event's standout voices was Jonathon Chambless, whose presence and perspective anchored much of the day's programming. Chambless brought the kind of lived experience and community



credibility that made conversations about youth development feel grounded rather than performative. His engagement throughout the event reflected a broader truth the Players Trust has long understood: meaningful impact in underserved communities requires authentic relationships, not just resources.

The Camelback High School Students Who Stole the Show The moment that drew some of the loudest reactions came from four students from Camelback High School, who presented an AI-powered baseball mound concept — a project that fused engineering, artificial intelligence, and a deep love of the sport into something genuinely impressive. Their pitch demonstrated exactly what happens when young people from underrepresented communities are given space, encouragement, and the right tools:

Event Recap

they build things that surprise everyone in the room, including themselves. It was one of those moments that makes the case for youth innovation programs more powerfully than any statistic could.

The Pathways Foundation: Sports, Technology, and Access Representatives from The Pathways Foundation were among the organizations Silicon Oasis connected with during the event. Founded on the belief that sports, technology, and education together create access and opportunity, the Pathways Foundation works to equip both transitioning athletes and young people with the tools and support to shape their own futures.

A core pillar of their work is AI fluency — running immersive innovation summits, AI accelerators, and professional certification programs that bridge inner-city youth and athletes at both collegiate and professional levels directly into the emerging economy.

Their presence at the Players Trust event was a natural fit, reflecting the growing overlap between athletic identity and entrepreneurial ambition.

The Reinvention Lab: Rethinking What Learning Can Be Also in attendance were representatives from Teach For America's Reinvention Lab — the organization's research and development engine for the future of learning. The Reinvention Lab



operates on the belief that innovation in education is adopted unequally, constrained by systems that make meaningful change difficult. Their work spans rapid-cycle research, AI integration for educators through programs like Reinvent AI, and experimental learning models designed to reach young people who have historically been left at the margins of educational innovation.

Seeing the Lab represented at a sports-anchored community event was a signal that the boundaries between athletics, education, and technology are continuing to blur — in the best possible way.

Events like this one don't often make the front page of tech publications. They happen in gyms and community spaces, with students who don't yet know they are builders, and with organizations that have been doing this work quietly for years.

GAMESTOCK RAISES \$2M IN PRE-SEED

This startup aims to turn trading into a competitive, community-driven experience.

A new entrant in the fintech space is betting on a shift in how individuals engage with financial markets. GameStock, a startup focused on competitive, social trading, has raised a \$2 million pre-seed round led by Peak XV. The raise reflects growing investor interest in platforms that move beyond traditional trading models and instead emphasize engagement, community, and competition.

The company is building what it describes as a “competition layer for financial markets,” where users can enter tournaments, construct portfolios, and compete against one another on leaderboards for real cash prizes. The approach blends elements of investing, gaming, and social interaction, positioning trading as a shared, participatory experience rather than a solitary activity.

This model represents a departure from conventional brokerage platforms, which have historically centered on individual decision-making and execution. Instead, GameStock is aligning itself with broader behavioral trends that emerged in recent years, where communities increasingly influence market activity.



Episodes such as the GameStop trading surge and the rise of social trading platforms have demonstrated the growing role of collective behavior in financial markets. Retail investors, often organized through online communities, have shown the ability to move markets and shape narratives, challenging traditional assumptions about how capital flows.

GameStock’s platform is designed to formalize and structure this dynamic. By introducing competitive formats and real-time performance tracking, the company aims to create an environment where trading becomes both transparent and interactive. Leaderboards, tournament structures, and financial incentives are intended to drive engagement while providing users with measurable benchmarks.

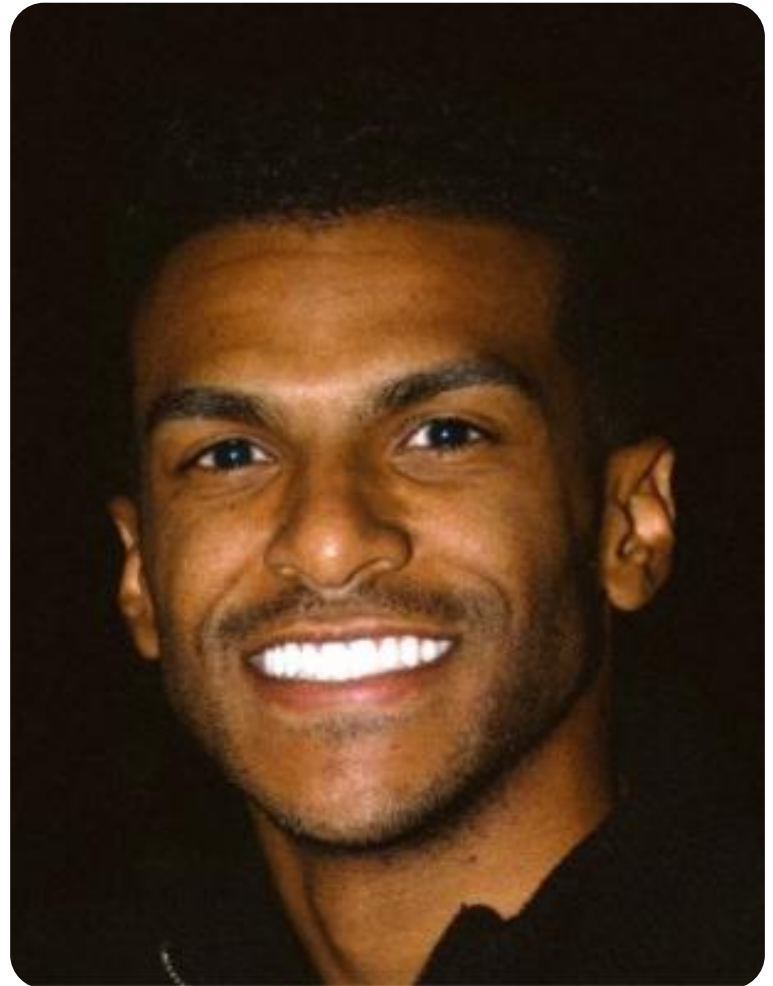
Funding Round

The company's founders — Antoine Mistico, Easton Dana, and Vivek Prasad — bring a mix of entrepreneurial and performance-driven backgrounds. Prasad, a former professional athlete, contributes a perspective shaped by competition and discipline, elements that are reflected in the platform's core design.

While the concept of gamifying financial activity is not new, the scale and sophistication of current platforms are evolving. Advances in mobile technology, data accessibility, and user interface design have made it easier to integrate real-time competition into financial tools. At the same time, younger generations of investors are seeking more interactive and engaging ways to participate in markets.

Investors appear to be responding to this shift. The backing from Peak XV suggests confidence not only in GameStock's execution but also in the broader category it represents. Competitive and social trading platforms are increasingly viewed as a potential next phase in fintech, particularly as traditional brokerage services become more commoditized.

However, the model also raises questions around risk, regulation, and user behavior. As trading platforms incorporate elements of competition and incentives, ensuring responsible participation and compliance with financial regulations will be critical. Companies operating in this space will need to balance engagement with safeguards designed to protect users.



Antoine Mistico - Co-Founder & CEO

For Silicon Oasis, GameStock's emergence highlights a broader trend within the evolving fintech landscape. Innovation is moving beyond improving transaction efficiency and into shaping how users experience and interact with financial systems.

As platforms like GameStock continue to develop, the opportunity may extend beyond the technology itself. Community-building, network effects, and user engagement are becoming central to how these platforms scale and sustain activity.

In that sense, the next wave of fintech may be defined less by execution speed and more by participation — where markets increasingly resemble competitive environments driven by collective interaction.

GameStock's early momentum suggests that this shift is already underway.

AREVON SECURES \$920M FOR ENERGY PROJECT

Scottsdale-based Arevon backs one of the largest U.S. battery storage projects.

A Scottsdale-based energy company is making a significant move in the renewable infrastructure sector.

Arevon Energy has closed approximately \$920 million in financing for the Nighthawk Energy Storage Project, a large-scale battery facility currently under construction in Poway, California.

Once completed, the project will deliver 300 megawatts (MW) of capacity and 1,200 megawatt-hours (MWh) of storage, positioning it among the largest standalone energy storage projects in the United States.

The financing reflects the increasing complexity and scale of capital flowing into clean energy infrastructure. The transaction combines multiple sources, including a \$482 million debt facility arranged by CIBC with participation from ING Capital, NORD/LB, Santander, and Zions Bancorporation.

In addition, Goldman Sachs Alternatives provided a \$169 million preferred equity investment, while a separate \$268 million tax credit transfer commitment was secured with a corporate buyer.



This type of capital stack has become more common as developers look to efficiently monetize federal clean energy incentives while maintaining ownership of long-term assets. Tax credit transfer structures, in particular, have gained traction following recent federal policy changes, allowing companies to directly sell tax credits to third parties.

Beyond financing, the Nighthawk project is designed to play a critical role in grid stability.

Once operational later this year, the facility is expected to supply enough energy to power approximately 385,000 homes for up to four hours during periods of peak demand.

Funding Round

The project utilizes lithium iron phosphate battery technology, which is widely adopted for its safety profile and efficiency in large-scale storage applications.

The system will store electricity during periods of lower demand and release it when energy consumption increases, helping to balance fluctuations in supply—particularly as renewable energy sources like solar and wind continue to expand.

Under a long-term agreement, the facility will provide resource adequacy capacity to Pacific Gas and Electric Company, supporting grid reliability across the San Diego region.

As utilities face increasing pressure to integrate intermittent renewable energy sources, large-scale storage systems are becoming essential components of modern grid infrastructure.

The project also carries measurable economic impact. Over its lifetime, the Nighthawk facility is expected to generate more than \$30 million in property tax revenue.

During peak construction, the project employed more than 130 workers, while also supporting local businesses in the surrounding Poway area.



The financing marks another milestone in Arevon's growth. The company operates more than 6 gigawatts of solar and storage assets across 18 states, representing over \$11 billion in investment, with \$5.1 billion in financings completed over the past two years.

For Arizona, Arevon's expansion highlights the state's growing role in energy and infrastructure innovation. As demand for reliable, clean energy rises, projects like Nighthawk reflect the scale and importance of modern grid solutions within the broader Silicon Oasis ecosystem.

TWO DESERTS, ONE VISION

Arizona and Dubai share a striking conviction: that the desert is not a limitation — it is a launchpad.

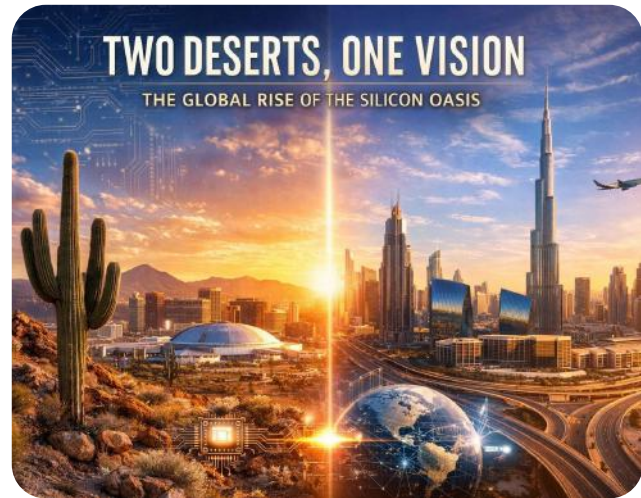
A Name, A Movement, A Global Parallel

When Silicon Oasis was founded as a community-driven initiative to unite Arizona's startup ecosystem, the name was intentional — evoking abundance in an unlikely place. What few outside the region may realize is that the same name and the same spirit had already been taking shape on the other side of the world for over two decades.

Dubai Silicon Oasis, established by law in 2005, has grown into one of the most consequential innovation districts in the Middle East, spanning 7.2 square kilometers. Two deserts. Two Silicon Oases. One shared conviction that great ideas have no geographic prerequisite.

What Dubai Built in the Sand

Dubai Silicon Oasis is not simply an office park with a tech-friendly name. It is a fully functioning city of innovators — home to more than 30,000 registered companies ranging from early-stage startups to multinationals including Fujitsu, AMD, and Huawei. The district operates as a designated free zone offering 0% corporate tax on qualifying income, 100%



foreign ownership, and fiber optic infrastructure supporting three dedicated data centers and eleven specialized industrial clusters. It also houses the Rochester Institute of Technology's Dubai campus, feeding trained technical talent directly into the ecosystem.

Dubai has reduced its oil dependency from 75% to just 20% through economic diversification — and DSO sits at the center of that story.

Arizona's Desert Is Also Rising On the other side of the world, Phoenix and the broader Arizona metro are undergoing a parallel transformation — quieter in its branding, but no less real in its trajectory. Silicon Oasis Arizona has emerged as a founder-led, community-first effort to unite the state's growing startup ecosystem: connecting early-stage

Innovation Trends

companies with investors, mentors, events, and each other through pitch nights, summits, a hard print magazine, and a daily news network.

Arizona's advantages are distinct but comparably compelling. The state offers lower costs than coastal markets, a growing university research pipeline through ASU and UArizona, favorable business regulation, and one of the fastest-growing metro economies in the United States. Where Dubai's model is government-anchored and infrastructure-heavy, Arizona's is community-driven and founder-led — two different engines running toward a strikingly similar destination.

Where the Models Diverge and Converge

The differences between the two ecosystems are real and worth naming. Dubai Silicon Oasis operates as a designated free zone with significant government backing, offering founders a highly structured entry into Middle Eastern and Asian markets.

Silicon Oasis AZ operates as a nonprofit-led community initiative, weaving together the state's innovation fabric through grassroots events and media rather than regulatory architecture. Yet beneath those structural differences, the parallels are hard to ignore. Both ecosystems are built on the belief that innovation is not the exclusive province of San Francisco or New York.

Both are actively working to decentralize



the global startup map. Both are attracting entrepreneurs, capital, and talent that traditional tech hubs are pricing out or overlooking. And both are proving that a desert address is no barrier to building something the world will notice.

The Opportunity in the Middle

As global innovation becomes more decentralized, ecosystems like Arizona and Dubai are no longer peripheral stories — they are the main event. The founders building in Phoenix today are operating in the same historic shift as the founders building in Dubai.

A world where Silicon Oasis Arizona and Dubai Silicon Oasis are recognized as sister ecosystems — connected by culture, ambition, and eventually capital — is not a distant vision. It is a logical next chapter. The desert, it turns out, is excellent foundation.

ARIZONA'S PROBLEM-SOLVERS ARE CHANGING THE GAME

**By: Sotiria Anagnostou,
Contributing Editor**

At a time when sustainability and climate innovation face increasing scrutiny and shifting economic priorities, Arizona's environmental leaders are taking a different approach — one grounded in execution, impact, and measurable results.

That shift was on full display at last week's Arizona Forward Environmental Excellence Awards, a program that has spent 44 years recognizing projects and organizations addressing the state's most pressing environmental challenges. But in 2026, the program introduced a notable evolution: awards are no longer centered on the type of project, but rather on the real-world outcomes those projects deliver.

The change reflects a broader trend within sustainability and climate-focused sectors, where emphasis is moving away from intention and toward performance. In a state like Arizona — where water scarcity, extreme heat, and rapid population growth intersect — solutions are increasingly judged by their ability to scale and endure.

This year's finalists offered a clear snapshot of that shift.



Among them was Arizona State University's Center for Negative Carbon Emissions, advancing technologies designed to remove carbon dioxide directly from the atmosphere. The work represents a growing focus on carbon removal as a necessary complement to emissions reduction, particularly in regions facing intensified climate pressures.

In the private sector, Honeywell Aerospace was recognized for its wastewater reuse system at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport — an initiative aimed at reducing water consumption in one of the state's most critical infrastructure hubs.

The project demonstrates how large-scale industrial players are integrating sustainability into operational systems, rather than treating it as a standalone initiative.

Cleantech & Sustainability - Innovation Trends

Similarly, McKinstry's comprehensive energy overhaul for the City of Glendale highlights how municipalities are approaching sustainability as both a cost-efficiency strategy and a long-term infrastructure investment. By modernizing energy systems, cities are not only reducing emissions but also improving resilience against rising energy demands.

Design and architecture also played a prominent role in this year's awards. GH2 Architects was recognized for its work in reimagining Mesa's urban core, reflecting a growing emphasis on sustainable urban development. As Arizona's cities continue to expand, projects like these are shaping how density, livability, and environmental responsibility intersect.

Collectively, the finalists point to a broader conclusion: sustainability in Arizona is no longer defined by isolated initiatives or pilot programs. Instead, it is being integrated into the core of how infrastructure is designed, built, and operated.

This evolution comes at a time when national conversations around climate and sustainability have become increasingly complex. Economic pressures, regulatory uncertainty, and shifting political priorities have created headwinds for some sectors. Yet in Arizona, the work continues — often led by engineers, operators, and founders focused less on messaging and more on outcomes.



There is also a growing sense of collaboration across industries. Public institutions, private companies, and design firms are working more closely together, creating solutions that extend beyond individual organizations. This cross-sector alignment is becoming a defining characteristic of Arizona's approach to sustainability.

For the broader innovation ecosystem, events like the Arizona Forward Awards highlight an important reality: climate and sustainability are not separate from economic growth — they are becoming central to it.

The projects recognized this year are not conceptual. They are scalable, operational, and embedded in the systems that support Arizona's future.

In that sense, the 2026 awards mark more than a programmatic shift. They reflect a change in mindset — one where success is measured not by ambition alone, but by the ability to deliver solutions that work. And in Arizona, those solutions are already taking shape.

ASU'S SPORTX GETS MAJOR BOOST FROM GODADDY

Turning college athletics into a launchpad for the next generation of entrepreneurs

A New Playbook for Student-Athletes

For decades, the arc of a college athlete's career followed a familiar script: compete, graduate, and figure out the rest. Arizona State University is rewriting that script. Through SPORTx — a universitywide initiative launched in 2025 to sit at the intersection of athletics and entrepreneurship — ASU is giving its nearly 700 Sun Devil student-athletes the tools, mentorship, and real-world experience to build businesses while they're still competing.

Now, with GoDaddy renewing and expanding its support through a new multimillion-dollar philanthropic commitment, that vision is gaining serious momentum.

The Partnership That Started It

All SPORTx was born out of a collaboration between ASU's J. Orin Edson Entrepreneurship + Innovation Institute, Sun Devil Athletics, ASU Enterprise Partners, and two key industry partners: GoDaddy and LEAD Venture Corporation, a premier



sports and health tech venture firm. The initiative is headquartered inside Mountain America Stadium in Tempe — a deliberate choice that puts the venture studio in the physical heart of Sun Devil athletics, making it easy for athletes to engage between practice sessions and classes. The proximity, program leaders say, has been one of the program's quiet advantages.

Two Pillars: Athletes and Ventures SPORTx runs on two tracks. The first is the Student-Athlete Venture Studio, powered by GoDaddy's Empower program, which helps athletes navigate the NIL landscape while equipping them with digital branding tools and access to GoDaddy Airo, the company's AI-powered business platform. The second focuses on venture

University Moves

development for sports-related startups, connecting early-stage companies with mentors, university research, and investor networks through LEAD Venture Corporation.

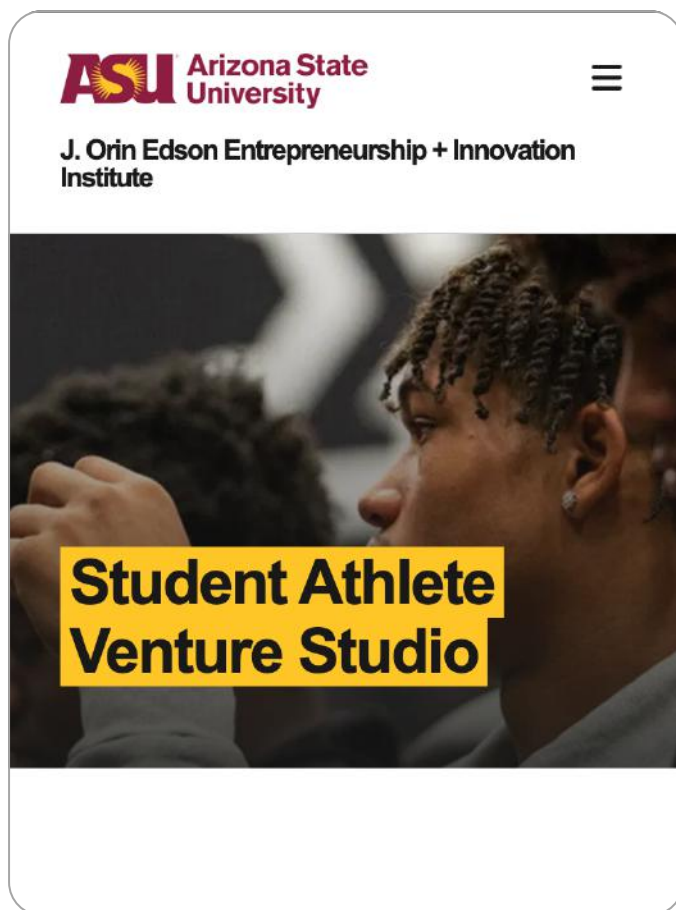
The Numbers Behind the Growth

Since launching, more than 500 student-athletes have engaged with the studio, over 350 websites have been activated through GoDaddy's free domain and hosting support, and more than 200 one-on-one mentorship sessions have been conducted.

GoDaddy's Empower program distributed \$300,000 to ASU student-led ventures in 2025 alone. That capital has already produced real companies — among them FuelWarden, an AI-driven nutrition platform founded by ASU lacrosse player Sierra Ryan, and PlainnPure, a skincare line launched by ASU wrestler David Szuba after securing funding through Venture Devils Demo Day.

The People Driving It Jeff Kunowski, founding SPORTx Director, has been the operational architect since day one. Kate Fitzgerald, a former ASU beach volleyball player who launched her own brand under the NIL framework, leads day-to-day athlete engagement — bringing firsthand credibility to every session.

Their work, alongside LEAD Venture and Exos CEO Dan Burns, reflects a program



that has assembled serious partners around a serious mission.

What Comes Next The sports innovation sector is one of the fastest-growing verticals in venture capital, driven by new technologies in athlete performance, fan engagement, and NIL-related business models. With GoDaddy's expanded commitment locked in and a growing roster of athlete-founders proving the model works, SPORTx has moved well past proof of concept. Program leaders are planning more Demo Days, a broader mentor roster, and a push to convert early momentum into funded, market-ready ventures. For AZ innovation ecosystem, SPORTx is yet another signal that world-class entrepreneurial infrastructure doesn't require a San Francisco zip code — it just requires the will to build it.

PROPTech: BLUEPRINTS FOR THE FUTURE

By: Dean Simms, Contributing Editor

Arizona built its identity on the land.

Wide-open spaces, sun-soaked landscapes, and an ambitious metropolis that never stopped expanding. That legacy lives today in the headquarters of homebuilders like Taylor Morrison and Meritage Homes, the construction yards of Sundt and Willmeng, and the regional offices of national titans like JLL, CBRE, Cushman, and McCarthy.

And it lives in the ambitions of locally rooted developers — Vestar, ViaWest, Walton Holdings, Sunbelt Holdings, Wentworth Property Company, Simon CRE, and Creation — who are reshaping landscapes nationwide while keeping their heaviest investments right here in Arizona. Now, a new chapter is being written — one where that foundational industry collides head-on with technology. At the center of it is a rag-tag group of founders, operators, and enthusiasts who refused to wait for permission to build it.

The story begins with Dean Simms-Elias, co-founder of the AZ PropTech Collective,



alongside Joe Phillips, Michael Malloy, and Alex Stockman. Watching the Valley transform around them — TSMC, Intel, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Virgin Galactic, and Hadrian bringing a new wave of tech professionals and startup-hardened talent to Phoenix — they noticed something conspicuous in its absence. CleanTech, DefenseTech, FinTech, and AI communities were forming. But PropTech, the sector sitting directly atop Arizona's most foundational industry, had no platform of its own.

So they built one. One of the Collective's first moves was to map the current PropTech landscape. The founders expected a modest list. What they found

Community Pillar

was a revelation: over 50 active startups operating in the Valley within the broad PropTech and ConTech umbrella — companies most of the real estate industry had never heard of, and most of the tech community had never engaged.

The landscape breaks down across six distinct categories.

Exchange platforms, led by pioneers like Offerpad and OpenDoor alongside newcomers like Easy Street Offers and Bold Street AI. Sales and ops tools, including AI assistants for Realtors, workflow tools for lenders like Loanscape, leasing management like NurtureBoss, and spatial intelligence from Radius AI. Property management leaders like SmartRent, Lessen, Radix, Quibble, and Bearing. New materials innovators such as Supersede, Enkoat, Cryo-X, and Glass Dynamics. Planning and design platforms like Privv and Craydl. And construction automation companies like FrameTec.

What struck the founders wasn't just the volume — it was the isolation.

These companies were operating in parallel, often selling into the same customer segments, without a shared space to trade notes, compare strategies, or find each other at all.

Bridging the Gap: Real Estate Meets

Tech The AZ PropTech Collective launched officially in October 2025 with a clear mandate: connect innovators and



bridge the gap between the traditional sector and the startup scene. The questions driving it are deceptively simple but carry billion-dollar implications.

Could seasoned real estate professionals provide the critical feedback innovators need to refine their products? Could a general contractor deploy a local startup's technology to slash build-out timelines, automate back-office headaches, or reduce operational costs? Could an executive become a mentor, sweat-equity advisor, or angel investor who helps a new founder scale? And perhaps most excitingly — does a traditional industry professional have a billion-dollar idea of their own and simply need the right co-founder to build it?

Why It Matters in Arizona's Rising Ecosystem

Arizona's momentum is real: talent is pooling, industrial expansion is accelerating, and the appetite for technology across traditional industries has never been stronger. The AZ PropTech Collective intends to be the channel that turns that appetite into action — connecting the capital, the operators, the builders, and the visionaries who will shape the future of real estate.

WHAT WE'VE BUILT SINCE COVID

By: Mat Sherman, Contributing Editor

Ten years ago I was just getting into tech. #yesphx was at large — hundreds showing up to their happy hours every few months. So was Phoenix Startup Week. I remember we filled an entire floor of the Integrate office in DT PHX. Startup AZ was flying high with their cohorts, helping early companies like Trainual, Prenda, and Qwick grow and scale. Things were really flowing in the valley. Then COVID hit and everything essentially died. The years coming out of COVID were hard, but I look around now and it's like we never skipped a beat. I wanted to reflect on what we have built since 2020, knowing that all the infrastructure from prior has more or less been washed out.

First off, Gregg Scoresby exited Campus Logic, started PHX Ventures, invested in a ton of companies, and seeded PHX FWD. He tapped local legend Clate Mask to run it, who tapped Marc Chelsey from Paradox to help with the capital side. This is the playbook — a win creates more surface area for more winners. And since acquiring Startup AZ, this is probably the most significant business startup community in Arizona. The events PHX FWD puts on are incredible — beautiful venue, great backdrop of Tempe, the vibe is just right. If you haven't been, you're missing out.



Companies like Legix, Notary Everyday, Sail, Bearing, Shilo, Stax AI, and more are getting funded at seed here. That's the pipeline forming.

Startup Week waned but AZ Tech Week was born. I have to give a real shoutout to the AZ Commerce Authority for pulling this together. 120 events in one week is no easy feat. That puts the limelight on Arizona for a full week and I am genuinely excited for the outcomes that come from it.

Carvana came back from the brink of death to become a global brand. Paradox sold for a billion dollars — massive win for AZ — and Copper Sky Capital, fka AZVC, was involved from the get-go. Big win for local capital.

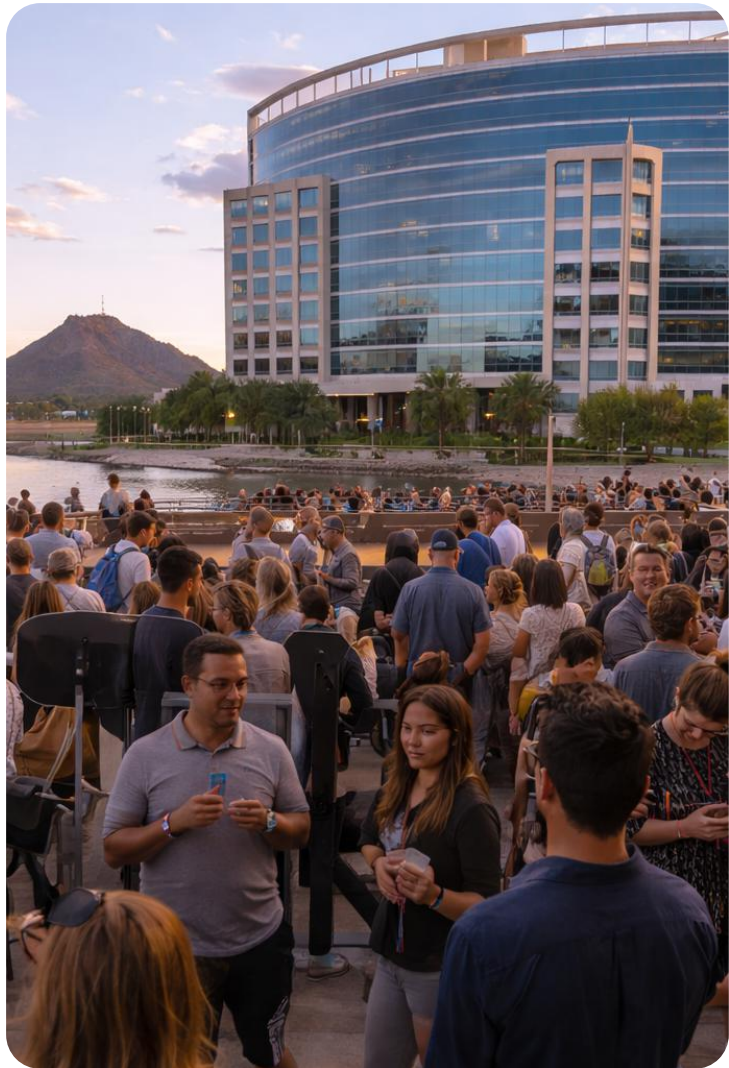
Community & Impact

There is more seed VC here than 10 years ago. Monsoon Venture Fund, Copper Sky Capital, PHX Ventures. None of these were around in 2016. And I need to give a nod to AZ's super angel, Stephen Cole. What they provide is not just capital, but infrastructure to help founders who aren't there yet level up and learn what it takes to get there. That infra is key — capital without support is just a check, and this community is starting to understand the difference.

Not to mention the big tech moves happening here. TSMC is a global brand and they chose Arizona. Hadrian opening their factory here is meaningful to anyone who knows startups and defense tech. These are not small signals.

The community orgs are more focused. Freeway has put on great summits for tech talent and Silicon Oasis created a thread everyone can pull on locally. And shoutout to Brent Sebold and DevLabs — galvanizing the ASU student community, building bridges to SF while keeping roots here, and creating a real on-ramp for students to get involved in the Arizona startup scene. That kind of bridge matters more than people realize.

Things just seem more aligned. We seem to be focused on the right things compared to 2016.



If I had to put my finger on what's changed since 2016, it's just that we have more experience. We know what's worked and what hasn't. We have more founders with experience and exits pouring back into the community. And this is what we need. Great people putting time into the scene — we will get there.

I've been known as a critic, but let it be known — I wrote this from a place of genuine optimism about what's going on here. I can't wait to write another one in a decade :)

MEET OUR BOARD MEMBERS



Sandra Watson
Arizona Commerce Authority



Steven Pidgeon
DLA Piper



Steve Brown
Trinity Capital



Michael DiMaria
Total Spectrum



John Ragan
Executive Director



Jerry Coleman
Offerpad



Jack Selby
Copper Sky Capital



Jeff Guldner
APS/Pinnacle West



Gregg Scoresby
PHX Ventures



Ernie Garcia Jr.
Carvana



Dennis Dahlen
Mayo Clinic



Clate Mask
PHX FWD, Keep



Andrew Lombard
Tesoro VC



Chris Camacho
Axon, former GPEC



Aaron Matos
Paradox



John Donahue
PRS

MEET OUR TEAM

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



Kyle Macdonald
Editor-in-Chief



Josue Romero
Managing Editor



Brenda Bechara
Chief of Staff

“ 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. ”

MEET OUR AMBASSADORS



Ville Houttu

Privv



Ryan Moorehouse

Ruck



Christopher Trocola
ARC Defense Systems



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