

Supporting local entrepreneurs for 13 years: FirstOntario 1Awards applications now open to small businesses in pitch competition

Small businesses can pitch to win and share \$190,000 in cash and professional services

Hamilton, ON, March 3, 2025 – Locally owned and home grown, the FirstOntario 1Awards are back for year 13, rewarding and recognizing small businesses that make our communities unique. Applications are open for businesses in operation for at least two years, with 50 employees or less and a home base in Hamilton, Halton, Brant, Niagara or surrounding areas – \$190,000 in cash and professional services is up for grabs.

“FirstOntario and 1Awards partners are all rooted in our communities. For more than a decade, we’ve been there for local business owners who need help to get to the next level,” said Joanne Battaglia, Senior Vice President, Marketing, Communications and Community Partnerships. “It’s important – given the uncertain times we are facing – to offer this support and continue to celebrate the success of our neighbourhood businesses.”

The purpose of the pitch competition is to award stand-out businesses with prizes to help build current success into a sustainable future. Winners share \$20,000 in cash and \$170,000 in professional services.

The competition wouldn’t be possible without 1Awards partners – also local business owners – who score the applications and the pitches, choose the winners and provide the prizes.

Partners include [Agro Zaffiro LLP](#), [Giant Shoe Creative](#), [KPMG](#), [Mohawk College](#), [PLAY](#), [The Hamilton Spectator](#), and [Weever](#). Additional sponsors include [The Thornton Group](#), [Hamilton Chamber of Commerce](#), [Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce](#) and [Carmen’s Group](#).

Finalists will put on a 15-minute pitch on May 8 to show past success, current challenges, future aspirations and a commitment to community. **The deadline to apply is 11:59 p.m. on Monday, March 31.** For full details and to apply online, visit [1Awards.ca](#)

About FirstOntario Credit Union

FirstOntario is a full service cooperative financial institution, serving members for more than 85 years throughout the Golden Horseshoe, Niagara Region and Southwestern regions of Ontario. With \$7 billion in assets under management, FirstOntario is one of Canada’s largest credit unions. Everyone is welcome to be part of FirstOntario for financial services including daily transactions, mortgages, lines of credit, loans and investments. FirstOntario profits are invested into the communities we serve through support for entrepreneurs, competitive rates and charitable pursuits including our award-winning student nutrition program. Learn more about us at [FirstOntario.com](#).

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