

**Start-ups Pitch Innovations To Improve Public Safety In Loudoun**

By Danielle Nadler Leesburg Today

**Loudoun County Challenge**

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Alvin T. Butler Sr. presents his company's product that allows organizations to accept text messages. Text2Them Inc. won the challenge's Most Disruptive Award.

It had everything a great brainstorming session should.

Start-up companies. PowerPoint presentations. Frequent use of words like “innovation” and “collaboration.” A cool venue, at Aol’s Dulles campus. And healthy competition over who had the best solutions for hard-to-solve problems.

But it wasn’t the typical idea-sharing event that lures entrepreneurs eager to have a stake in the next big thing. This was a chance for companies to showcase high-tech solutions to Loudoun County’s public safety issues.

“This really is the first of its kind,” Steve Hargan, Loudoun County Economic Development Department’s interim business development officer, said. “This allows taxpayers the advantage of ideas and innovations that are out there—and many of them are right here in our community.”

The four-hour event, dubbed the Loudoun County Challenge, was put on by the EDC, the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce and Innovative Solutions Consortium, which specializes in these sorts of tech-sharing challenges but typically for large government agencies or industry heavyweights like Microsoft.

“My dream has always been to bring something like this to Loudoun County, my community,” said Ken Spedden, founder of Innovative Solutions Consortium who lives in Leesburg.

He spread the word about the challenge and invited companies to bring their creative solutions on how to improve safety in Loudoun, while saving money and time.

And they responded to the call.

Companies from as far away as Florida to right here in Loudoun attended the challenge Wednesday to not only present how their products could help the county but also teamed up to show how their innovations can work together.

Start-up Text2Them Inc. won the challenge’s Most Technology Disruptive Award for its product that would allow every county department, including 911 dispatchers, to accept, respond to and track text messages from the public in emergency or non-emergency situations. President and CEO Alvin T. Butler Sr. noted that text messaging surpassed phone calls in 2008, yet most companies and organizations still cannot accept text messages.

“Texting is very discreet and also you can send pictures and video, which you can’t do by voice,” he said.

Lt. Charles Manning with Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office, who sat on the six-person judges panel called the idea a game changer. He oversaw the county’s 911-dispatch center for the last year and a half and said, “What you’re proposing is an area we can improve upon. It’s in a good price point, it’s easy to implement and it’s forward thinking.”

TRX Systems won the competition’s Most Innovative Award for its device that tracks people indoors when GPS is unavailable.

Loudoun County Fire and Rescue Battalion Chief Michael Johnson, who also served as a judge on the panel, said the company’s product combined with company Location Based GPS’ devices that monitor a person’s vital signs in real time would help save time and lives in emergency situations where firefighters can’t communicate when they are in a burning building.

“One of our biggest challenges is locating personnel in emergency situations,” he said. “With this, if a firefighter goes down we can get them oxygen and get them out safely.”

Other companies that competed in the Loudoun County Challenge were: Elbit Systems of America, Falcon Logic, GXM Consulting LLC, Skyline Software Systems Inc., TerraFly Inc, YaData Inc. and elearning Joe LLC.

Now that some great ideas have been aired, the next step is to work within the county’s procurement rules to try to put some of those ideas into action, Hargan said. “We’re not going to just let all these ideas die. Now we need to see what it will take to bring them online.”

Scott K. York, chairman of the county Board of Supervisors, seemed to want to continue the conversation with the groups that presented. He expressed thanks to the companies that were willing to use Loudoun as a platform to share their innovations.

“I can’t think of anything more important than to come together and provide an opportunity to help create a safer environment,” he said. “If we use the advantages we have today with technology, we certainly can improve the quality of life for everybody.”

The next challenge Hargan and Spedden want to host is for Loudoun County Public Schools. They are putting the call out to companies now for improvements to education and school safety, and they hope to host an event within the next three to four months.