

CODE THE FUTURE

WITH ITS INTERESTING TWO PROGRAMS, TCNJ TECH START-UP IS DRIVING, JIVING, AND -- NOW -- HIRING

BY SEAN LANGE

“We try to be as unique as we can be.”

For Code the Future CEO Sarah Sleiman, '19, along with her COO Dominic Clark, '19, and CCO Megha Rathi, '19, this mindset applies to differentiating their company not only in this year's Mayo Business Plan Competition, which the trio will enter after having reached the finals in the competition together three years ago, but also in the quickly growing industry for cultivating youth interest and talent in computer programming.

Since her time at North Brunswick Township High School, Sleiman envisioned a program that would give K-8 students at partner school districts opportunities to learn, hone, and showcase skills in digital coding. The first incarnation of this concept was Elementary Robotics, a not-for-profit business model that netted third place in the MBPC in 2016. With its prize money, Elementary Robotics would foot the fees to register as a non-profit organization and purchase robotics kits, eventually finalizing contracts with school in northern New Jersey and beginning to run its programs.

As scaling continued, however, Sleiman realized that a non-profit business model conferred certain disadvantages, like restrictions on scaling potential and having to seek out professional grant-writing services. Conversely, applying a for-profit business model to

the code-teaching concept would afford Sleiman and her team the ability to grow quickly and have direct access to capital. Enter Code the Future: the new business that Sleiman, Clark, Rathi, and a new team member, Pulkit Gupta '19, have developed, rolled out, and expanded in the past year.

Currently, the team is booked for every weekend in March and April for its camps, which are held in elementary schools, public libraries, and colleges throughout New Jersey. Now, Code the Future is looking to hire code-savvy employees that can both teach technical concepts at a basic level and interact with young students. Code the Future will also vie for the Mayo Competition's top prize this spring.

Sleiman emphasizes that Code the Future is more of a reinvention of Elementary Robotics



than an update of it. While Elementary Robotics offered after school and club science programs, Code the Future partners with schools to teach students during their regularly scheduled STEM class, and also runs larger camps on weekends. Code the Future offers programs to students ranging from beginner coders in second grade to seventh and eighth grade students who have mastered fundamental coding skills.

At the fundamental level, the executive team that founded Elementary Robotics has undergone changes, too, resulting in the addition of Gupta as the company's CTO. Sleiman, Clark, and Rathi were also only freshman when Elementary Robotics debuted in 2016; and the C-suite team has gained valuable experience and insight regarding their field since then.

However, the key differentiator may be Code the Future's unique pairing of coding programs, the two of which are also designed to provide reasonably advanced coding insights and skills. These strengths help Code the Future stand out in the growing market for digital technology education. “Other programs do coding with really simple coding languages,” say Sleiman. “We wanted our programs to be unique and relevant. Imagine if our students who took our Smart Car Developer program grow up to become engineers at Tesla! Our goal is to help students find their passion.”

The two programs that Code the Future offers are an interesting match. Today, a primordial programmer for self-driving vehicles would enroll in the Smart Car Developers program, in which students code a car to self-navigate courses with varying challenges and obstacles. While pro-

gramming an autonomous car is a staple for beginner coders, Code the Future transfers the principles from that program to an entirely different discipline with its Music Engineers course.

Sleiman and her team have seen special success with their Music Engineers program, which is offered to third through sixth graders. “There's art in technology,” Sleiman observes, “and our goal is to reach another group of students: ones who are interested in playing instruments. There are other applications for coding beyond just cars and robots.”

The Code the Future CEO chalks up some of the creative products that have already come out of her company to the synergy that occurs when students from multiple TCNJ schools are brought together. “Pairing business students with engineering students creates an amazing team,” she notes.

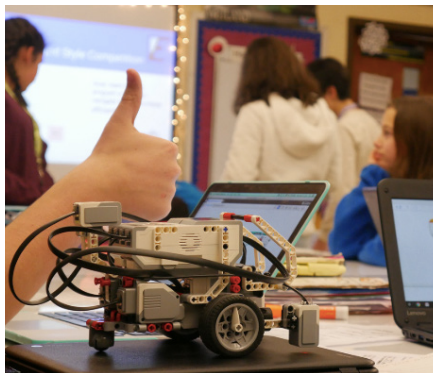
“In general, you could pair creators with communicators, or sellers, and create so many tech companies.” Sleiman herself, a Management major, has benefited from these relationships first-hand. “[In high school,] I tried engineering and coding, but I didn't love it as much as I did many aspects of business.” While Sleiman enjoys traveling, organizing events, raising money, and researching and procuring the newest technologies for Code the Future, her team helps her create the platforms and craft the programs that her logistics and management efforts fuel.

Today, the hard work of the Code the Future team is evident. The company currently has contracts with two NJ school districts, runs programs at colleges such as TCNJ and Ramapo, and is actively looking for avenues to expand its presence. Sleiman acknowledges that there are challenges that face her and her team in the near future; but as of right now, Code the Future is both on the right course and keeping in tune with the products that appeal to its student consumers. ♦

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**INTERESTED IN CODE THE FUTURE?
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THE BB&L CULTURE & COMMERCE

Jared Kofsky: **NEW JERSEY, NEW BUSINESS**

Two growing coffee chains are preparing to expand into northern New Jersey, as is a Manhattan restaurant group.

While locations of Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts can be found in nearly every corner of New Jersey from Somers Point to Somerville, some other coffee shops are looking to add themselves into the mix. Additionally, a north Jersey mall that has been under construction for well over a decade could finally be coming close to opening day while a major arena in the Garden State could soon become a hub of sorts when it comes to aviation. Here is your first New Jersey business update of 2019, based on stories initially featured on JerseyDigs.com.



It's no secret that New Jerseyans love their coffee. The state is filled with independent coffee shops like Trenton Coffee House and Records in the capital city, local chains like Rook Coffee along the Jersey Shore, and international brands like Dunkin' Donuts throughout the state. Despite the market already being saturated with coffee shops and cafés, more are continuing to open in the Garden State. A growing chain from the Midwest is looking to become part of New Jersey's caffeine craze. Ann Arbor, Michigan-based **Sweetwaters Coffee & Tea** is preparing to open its first location in the Northeast, in downtown Newark's Hahne & Co. building. The 1,582-square-foot franchise will be situated along Halsey Street near Whole Foods Market's Newark location. The news of Sweetwaters' expansion into the state comes amid rapid growth for the chain, which also serves sandwiches, salads, shakes, and pastries besides the hot beverages. Other locations are in the works for Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, New York, and North Carolina.



While Sweetwaters has confirmed its plans to open in New Jersey's largest city, a smaller chain has not yet commented on its rumored plans to open in nearby Hudson County. **Café Grumpy** is expected to open in or adjacent to the upcoming Whole Foods Market store at the Lincoln Harbor complex in Weehawken. A legal notice shows that Whole Foods Market Group, Inc. recently applied for approvals to add a large Café Grumpy sign in front of its upcoming store. Café Grumpy is based in Brooklyn, and also operates in Manhattan and Florida. The Weehawken supermarket was initially expected to be part of Whole Foods Market's new 365 brand of stores, but the chain's new owner, Amazon, recently announced that it will be discontinuing the 365 concept. Despite this reversal, the Weehawken location will still move forward as a Whole Foods Market store.



If you have ever been on the New Jersey Turnpike's western spur in East Rutherford at any point over the last decade, you have likely seen the massive structure at the Meadowlands Sports Complex that was once supposed to become the Meadowlands Xanadu mall. The project has been delayed multiple times over the last several years, causing the date of the grand opening to be pushed back countless times. However, with construction now underway at the site, it appears that



what is now being referred to as the American Dream Meadowlands mall could open this year. In fact, multiple retailers and restaurants have already been confirmed for the shopping and entertainment center, including **Dons Bogam**, a small New York-based chain of Korean barbecue restaurants. The business, which is owned by Group KFF, Inc., is planning to open its first location outside of Manhattan's Koreatown neighborhood at the American Dream Meadowlands this summer. Group KFF COO Kyung Kim said the company felt that the new mall presented an opportunity for the restaurant to expand into the New Jersey market. Kim expects that the East Rutherford location will feature a menu that will be similar to those at its New York restaurants.



Back in Newark, the Prudential Center remains one of the city's most visited attractions. Home to the New Jersey Devils, the Grammy Museum Experience, and dozens of annual entertainment events, the Newark Housing Authority-owned attraction currently features its logo on the roof of the building. Now, something else could be added to the center's rooftop. **Devils Arena Entertainment** is planning to add a heliport to the roof of the complex, according to a legal notice. The 3,025-square-foot facility would be one of the first of its kind in Newark, though it would not be the only heliport in the downtown area. New Jersey Devils co-owner Josh Harris made headlines nearly four years ago when he landed his helicopter a few blocks away from the Prudential Center on the St. Benedict's Preparatory School soccer field just before a youth soccer game was expected to begin there. Although it is not used frequently, the soccer field is actually a licensed heliport. ♦

AMAZON PURCHASES INNOVATIVE WIFI COMPANY

BY MATTHEW MANCUSO

Amazon just announced the purchase of Eero, a growing internet company. While it might not be very well known to the public, **Eero** is notable to those who are interested in the tech sector for its advanced internet-connection systems.

Eero is one of the most innovative companies that produces state-of-the-art WiFi routers. What makes Eero's routers so advanced is their ability to deliver faster WiFi connections to phones, computers, and other electronic devices. Its routers deliver some of the most efficient speeds in the world and are in high demand as they are among the fastest on the commercial market.

This purchase follows Seattle-based Amazon's market plan to invest in smart-home companies. They already purchased Ring, which produced a smart doorbell allowing homeowners to communicate with whomever is at their front door. Amazon's investment in the home security system Blink also indicated their strategy to take over the home technology market. Blink provides securi-

ty cameras that can be viewed from a customer's phone.

Amazon's Echo device has the ability to incorporate all of these products to form a compatible home technology system that is entirely owned by Amazon. While many other companies like Apple and Google have attempted to create virtual assistants, the Amazon Echo has been the only one that has truly succeeded, largely because it can incorporate every virtual assistant that is around the home. Eero is Echo-compatible and should be one of the final pieces in Amazon's plan to corner the home technology market.

While it may seem like college students are unaffected by these seemingly insignificant deals, that is extremely far from the truth. The chances are that the majority of college students own at least one Amazon item and some colleges are installing Alexa devices in dorms. Plus, when current college students are living in their own houses in the coming decades, their Amazon devices will allow them to involve more technology into their homes.



Beyond investing in smart-home companies, Amazon has been busy across the board. Over the past year, they merged with Whole Foods Market for a combined \$13.7 billion dollars. The company has also invested billions of dollars into developing new ways to shop, donate, and drive. Now, Amazon not only is offering a website that just focuses on selling products, but it is attempting to offer services that influence us in our everyday lives.

Eero will likely be one of the final pieces in Amazon's plan to control the home technology market. This should be the end of their pursuit to corner the housing-tech market. Thanks to Amazon, the housing could drastically change forever in the not-too-soon future. ♦

THE BB&L
In The School of Business

DON'T GET BURNED ON CANNABIS STOCKS

Reducing risk while investing in the theme of legalization

BY CONNOR C. INTRONA

Last summer, a Canadian pharmaceutical company, Tilray, made history when it became the first major cannabis company to debut on the NASDAQ. Shortly after its initial public offering, the company's common stock caught fire and became one of the most impressive trades of the year. \$TLRY went on to produce a return of more than a whopping 1,200% -- climbing from \$17 per share to \$233.58 per share in a matter of weeks. By the second week of September, it was quickly becoming apparent that the market was getting ahead of itself. Despite Tilray taking advantage of a popular investment theme (legalization of marijuana), the valuation that the market had put on its stock was far from sustainable at then-current company levels. Soon enough, the stock of Tilray burned out and tumbled, hard. Since then, shares of the company have been relatively flat, meandering on hopes of more widespread legalization or M&A activity. Investors who jumped on Tilray in July or August of 2018 still have an enormous gain to boast about. As for every other investor who arrived later, the stock has not been very kind to their portfolios.

Tilray is the perfect example of why an investor must exercise considerable caution when dealing with cannabis stocks. Considering much of its success is contingent on legalization and regulatory clearance, the group has been extremely volatile, making massive swings in both bullish and bearish directions. If anything, the stocks of cannabis companies, such as Canopy Growth Corporation (\$CGC), Aurora Cannabis (\$ACB), the Cronos Group (\$CRON), GW Pharmaceuticals (\$GWPH), and Tilray (\$TLRY), have become fierce trading vehicles instead of suitable investments. For traders, these names might be appealing for a multitude of reasons, including steep price fluctuations and high betas. But, in a nutshell, too much of their valuation is built on speculation, rather than intrinsic value. While cannabis stocks may hold an appropriate place in a well-diversified portfolio, they should not be a core holding because of their popularity with traders. For example, this is one of the reasons why Advanced Micro Devices (\$AMD), as well known and popular as it is, is generally not a core holding of managed funds and large portfolios. \$AMD, with a 2.3 Beta and tendency to swing heavily, is not exactly as investment-grade as its peers Intel (\$INTC), Broadcom (\$AVGO), Texas Instruments (\$TXN), and Qualcomm (\$QCOM).

Because of their generally low share prices (and associated high volume) and tendency to make drastic moves, the aforementioned cannabis names and other stocks of the

like have attracted many investors in the stock market. On brokerage platforms such as Robinhood, cannabis stocks are amongst the most popular investments -- hinting that millennials are trying to get invested in them. It has become cheap to pick up large quantities of shares of \$ACB, \$CRON, and (to a lesser extent) \$CGC -- but doing so could be a serious investing mistake. Millennials, while younger and more amenable to handling risk, should still think about risk when building portfolios. It is very important, for any investor, to not just invest in a company for political or social

limits on the opportunity for cannabis-related business ventures in the United States. Just because cannabis companies are not exactly investment-grade as of 2019 does not mean they will never be in the future. Although much is still controversy surrounding it, the legal status of cannabis in the United States appears to be heading for a green-light within the coming years.

There are many suitable options for investors who would like exposure to cannabis but do not want to sacrifice major gains in the process. The easiest way to get exposure to stocks such as \$ACB, \$CRON, and \$CGC would be to simply buy shares; however, it should be advised that these names should only be considered when one already has a well-diversified portfolio. Because of their speculative status and shaky fundamentals, they should occupy a very small part of a broader portfolio. At a maximum, these stocks should only make up 5% of one's total investments, and that is a very figure generous. If one wants diversified exposure to cannabis, ETF Managers Trust ETFMG Alternative Harvest ETF (\$MJ) is a quality option. Diversification through many cannabis companies, instead of just one, is a reasonable way to invest in the theme of legalization. However, just because \$MJ is diversified does not mean it should occupy a large stake in any one investment portfolio. Rather, it is a good way to hedge individual risk.

But what if an investor wants to buy an individual company's stock without having direct exposure? Luckily, many well-established companies have footholds in cannabis -- enter Altria (\$MO), Constellation Brands (\$STZ), and AbbVie (\$ABBV). These companies, which offer tremendous shareholder value on countless metrics, have business interests in cannabis. If entirely legalized, it is not outlandish to claim that the recreational marijuana industry will be ruled by the "Sin Kings" (Altria, Philip Morris International, AB InBev, etc.) and the medicinal marijuana industry will be dominated by "Big Pharma." Altria (which has heavy holdings in tobacco, alcohol, and, now, vaporizers) has already purchased a 45% ownership stake in \$CRON. Constellation Brands, which has a vast portfolio of wine, beer, and other spirits, owns 38% of \$CGC, as well. AbbVie, which is a major drug company, has already explored treatments involving THC and other cannabinoids.

Ultimately, the focus for any investor should always be risk management. Buying shares in \$MO and \$STZ will give investors exposure to cannabis at limited risk; but the future of cannabis is uncertain. Any mentioned strategy should still be exercised with caution. ♦

Investing in the Cannabis

Possible investment vehicles, from greatest to least exposure to the cannabis business risk

CRONOS
GROUP

CANNABIS
COMPANY
STOCK

MJ
ALTERNATIVE HARVEST ETF

CANNABIS
ETF

Altria

RECREATIONAL
INTEREST

abbvie

MEDICAL
INTEREST

Exposure to cannabis business risks

reasons. History has shown many times in countless cases, there is no room for that mindset when building a successful and profitable investment portfolio.

In the United States, there are only four places where cannabis use of any kind is illegal: Idaho, South Dakota, Nebraska, and American Samoa. The District of Columbia, the Northern Mariana Islands, several Native American land reservations, and ten states have unilaterally legalized the drug for all intents and purposes. Other than the aforementioned four jurisdictions with prohibitions, every other U.S. state and territory has legalized the use of cannabis for medicinal reasons. Although some states have stricter regulations than others, there are fewer and fewer

A ROSE BY ONLINE DELIVERY MAY SMELL JUST AS SWEET

February sales demonstrate decline in brick-and-mortar floral industry

BY KATHY DOBROW

Valentine's Day is time to celebrate loves both romantic and platonic. What better way to show this than with flowers? Flowers on Valentine's Day make up almost 13% of annual floral sales, as reported by the Society of American Florists (SAF). To participate in this tradition, however, you must also be okay with your wallet lightening, with the SAF in 2018 also reporting



that a dozen red roses are sold on average for \$85 in February, \$20 higher than their usual average price the rest of the year.

Nonetheless, brick-and-mortar florists may be yet another industry that Millennials are killing. According to IBISWorld, most of the traditional retail floral business is supported by Baby Boomers. More recent generations prefer to buy other gifts, or purchase flowers online or at a supermarket. As a result, independent florists' revenues have declined by an average of 1.2% each year over the past decade. The florist industry is predicted to shrink further as popularity for the alternatives among younger buyers grows, unless specialty florists can cultivate an online presence in the right fields.



The SAF reports that florists that promote sales through a Pinterest account get double the business of those advertising on Facebook.

Nevertheless, with e-commerce giants foraying into the retail florist industry, such as Amazon did in September 2013, if you buy flowers for that special someone on Valentine's Day in the future, it will likely be digitally. ♦

THE BB&L REVIEW

FILM TWO STARS ARE BORN

A Star is Born

BY GEORGE SEITIS

Full disclosure: it pains me to say that I haven't actually seen any of the other versions of *A Star is Born*. After seeing this version, however, I feel like I shouldn't seek out any of the past iterations. While the title of this review is not particularly original, it is particularly fitting since, outside of its plot, two real stars have emerged from this project: Lady Gaga as an actress and Bradley Cooper as a director.

I mean, there really isn't much to say about Lady Gaga's performance, other than she knocked it out of the park. Going into watching the picture, I knew she would at least nail the performance scenes, because that's who she is – an excellent singer and performer. But I was particularly surprised with how well she performed in the more intimate and emotional scenes; I didn't see any signs of artificiality anywhere in her performance. This quality doesn't just apply to Gaga, however; it applies to virtually the entire cast. From an unrecognizable Andrew Dice Clay and Dave Chappelle, to Bradley Cooper and his on-screen brother, Sam Elliott, the acting never felt forced and instead felt incredibly real. I was particularly impressed with Cooper and Elliott's performances; both of which were subdued and performed for the camera, not for the stage, which is something I feel many film performances tend to be lately. Playing to the medium's strengths only makes a film stronger, and Cooper and Elliott's performances embodied that for me in *A Star is Born*.

Although this is his directorial debut, Bradley Cooper's confidence as a storyteller was clearly present within the film's first five minutes.

and weight. This, no doubt, was Cooper's intention, as he has armed himself with a crew of experts to help him succeed in his freshman directorial effort: you certainly cannot go wrong with Matthew Libatique behind the camera and Jay Cassidy in the cutting room. Like his actor-turned-director "mentor," Clint Eastwood, I feel strongly that Cooper will have an amazing future in the director's chair based on his successful efforts here.

However, this film is not without its flaws. Really, my issue with the film comes down to the writing. Simply put, the film's last act is incredibly predictable. Now, this may be because, like I said, this is the fourth version of the film to hit the big screen, but with all the talent in the film's corner, I felt

I mean, there really isn't much to say about Lady Gaga's performance, other than she knocked it out of the park.

Although this is his directorial debut, Bradley Cooper's confidence as a storyteller was clearly present within the film's first five minutes. I could tell that Cooper had soaked up all he could from the excellent directors he has worked with in the past (David O. Russell and Clint Eastwood, just to name a few). The film feels like a seasoned filmmaker made it, as it has a classic Hollywood vibe



like the writing could've employed a revision or two, specifically in that last act. I'm not going to spoil anything here; but fortunately, the power of the performances and the film's technical aspects, as well as Cooper's directing, more than make up for the

slightly weaker writing at the film's tragic ending, and I was left very impressed overall.

Reflecting on the film now, I suppose this writing flaw actually illustrates one of the film's main themes, which is the constant battle between art and commerce, specifically in the film and music industries. As the film progresses, Gaga's character Ally gains more and more commercial popularity, but at the mercy of her artistic integrity. Her work becomes anesthetized, sterile, and very much cookie-cutter when considering the pop music landscape of today. At the same time, our hero, Jackson Maine, tries to save her artistic integrity while failing to realize the destruction of his own. His character arc, which also is part of the weakly written part of the film, unintentionally (or, perhaps, intentionally) serves as a metaphor for the film's message.

Perhaps this film did so well because of the star power of Cooper and Gaga. But likely this film was made only because it followed, to some degree, the cookie cutter formula that has existed for at least three other versions.

Perhaps this film did so well because of the star power of Cooper and Gaga. But likely this film was made only because it followed, to some degree, the cookie cutter formula that has existed for at least three other versions, the formula that did so well all three times. Cooper said himself that this film was a passion project for him, but while his passion is clear behind the camera, perhaps, like Ally, part of his passion was ultimately sacrificed for the sake of commerciality. ♦



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THE BULL, BEAR & LION

THE STUDENT BUSINESS NEWSPAPER OF THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY

Volume VII, Number i

March 2019



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