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!InService Claims Grand Prize at 2026 NSpire Startup Slam
Premier Pitch Competition Awards Over \$100,000 in Capital and Services

- **!InService wins 2026 Nspire Startup Slam, takes home \$100,000+ prize**
- **Prize package includes \$50,000 in non-dilutive cash funding and over \$50,000 in in-kind services**
- **Finals held Thursday, January 8, 2026 at Columbia Theatre for the Performing Arts in Historic Downtown Hammond**
- **Produced by STartUP Northshore; Presenting sponsor Chevron; Grant funding provided by Capital One**

COVINGTON, LA – STartUP Northshore has announced that [**!InService**](#) is the winner of the 2026 NSpire Startup Slam, securing one of the largest pitch competition prize packages in the Gulf South valued at more than \$100,000 in non-dilutive cash and in-kind services. Against the backdrop of the historic Columbia Theatre for the Performing Arts in Downtown Hammond on January 8, a packed audience gathered to celebrate entrepreneurship and innovation before watching three finalist startups take center stage.

The competition, now in its third year, showcased the vision and creativity of three remarkable Louisiana-based startups—**BRUH. Skincare**, **WSPER**, and **!InService**. Attendees enjoyed live music, food, and drinks before the founders pitched their companies live to a panel of respected judges representing industry, finance, and economic development.

“This award creates immediate impact for our company by enabling job creation and accelerating our go-to-market efforts,” said **Gene Billingsley Founder and CEO of !InService**. “We are incredibly grateful to be part of the Tri-Parish Northshore community, which actively invests in entrepreneurs and helps transform startups into lasting, community-focused businesses. I encourage anyone building a business to lean in and take full advantage of these incredible resources.”

The judging panel, composed of accomplished business leaders and entrepreneurs from across the Northshore and Greater New Orleans region, evaluated each startup on innovation, market opportunity, business model, traction, team strength, and regional impact. !InService, an assistive intelligence cloud platform that modernizes public safety by replacing outdated CAD and RMS systems with real time, CJIS compliant operations, emerged as the top scoring company following a competitive live pitch and question and answer session. The runners-up, BRUH. Skincare and WSPER, each received \$5,000 grants to support their ventures.

“Last night’s NSpire Startup Slam was electric - from the founders on stage to the community filling the theatre to support our homegrown talent,” said **Russell Richardson, President and CEO of St.**



Tammany Economic Development Corporation. “Events like NSpire don’t just celebrate a winner. They signal what’s ahead for our region’s economy, and the future’s entrepreneurial pipeline is incredibly promising. Congratulations to !nService on a well-earned win.”

The prize package that !nService walked away with included \$40,000 in cash funding paired with high-quality in-kind services, mentorship opportunities, and access to a network of investors and industry professionals valued at over \$50,000. The wrap-around in-kind service package includes business advisement services from **The Bernard Group** and **MCDS, LLC**; marketing and branding strategy from **Ninety by Three, LLC** and **PERK Social**; startup legal, business, and intellectual property consulting services from **Arena Collective**; accounting and bookkeeping consultation from **OfficeOps**; business card and sign printing services from **Mele Printing**; a one-year founding membership to **Palette Northshore**, a workspace community for entrepreneurs; and memberships to the **St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce** and **Tangipahoa Chamber of Commerce**.

Following two rounds of a rigorous application and independent panel review, the three finalists were selected to advance to the main stage. As the finalists prepared to take the stage, each startup received one-on-one professional pitch coaching from **Abbey Lovett, CEO & Founder of Pathos Coaching** and a three-time national champion speaker.

In addition to !nService, the finalists who competed in the live competition were:

- **BRUH. Skincare**, who delivers accessible, no-nonsense skincare for men with products that make routines simple and clear. With names like “BRUH. wash your face” and “BRUH. you need to moisturize,” the brand removes confusion, offers high quality formulations, and brings the performance of premium products to a straightforward, guy-friendly experience.
- **WSPER**, which provides next generation safety technology with reliable, hardware-based panic buttons and IoT sensor systems that deliver verified alerts and faster first responder engagement. Their ecosystem of wearable devices, environmental sensors, and automated cloud workflows solves the industry’s biggest failure point: panic buttons that fail when urgency matters most.

The panel of expert judges tasked with rigorously reviewing, scoring, and selecting the ultimate winner included:

- **Josh Fleig**, Chief Innovation Officer, Louisiana Economic Development
- **Katharine Kay**, Greater New Orleans Market President, Capital One
- **Kyle Kent**, President, Kent Design Build, Inc.
- **Chris Meaux**, Founder and CEO - QiMana Inc., Chairman of the Board - Mallard Bay Outdoors
- **Davorio Stevenson**, Louisiana Innovation Network Manager, The Idea Village

This pitch competition represents STartUP Northshore’s commitment to and investment in building programs that support local entrepreneurs and cultivate the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem. The



organization delivers world-class programming, networking opportunities, access to capital, and mentorship from esteemed industry leaders, investors, and founders at little to no cost to the startups.

“What we saw at the 2026 NSpire Startup Slam was a powerful reminder of how innovation grows when a community shows up to support its entrepreneurs,” said **Ginger Cangelosi, Executive Director of Tangipahoa Economic Development**. “Tangipahoa Parish Economic Development congratulates !nService and their team. We were proud to host this event in the heart of Downtown Hammond and to showcase the talent, creativity, and drive that continue to move our region forward.”

The 2026 NSpire Startup Slam was made possible through the financial support and partnership of our presenting sponsor, **Chevron**, and our grant prize sponsor, **Capital One**. Additional funding partners include **St. Tammany Economic Development Corporation**, **Tangipahoa Economic Development Foundation**, **Washington Economic Development Foundation**, **Louisiana Economic Development**, **Hancock Whitney Bank**, and the **Northshore Community Foundation**. Special thanks to our media partners at **Northshore Media Group** and **The Times Picayune | NOLA.com**, as well as our photography and videography partners at **Advidly**. Event partners include Southeastern Louisiana University and the Columbia Theatre for the Performing Arts, with special recognition going out to Dr. William Wainwright, President of Southeastern Louisiana University, Dr. Tará Lopez, Dean of the College of Business at Southeastern Louisiana University, and the staff at Columbia Theatre.

About STartUP Northshore

STartUP Northshore is cultivating a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem through strategic partnerships with leading organizations in the startup community, including the Louisiana Small Business Development Center at Southeastern Louisiana University and The Idea Village, to deliver first-class programming for entrepreneurs and second-stage companies. STartUP Northshore is supported by a regional collaboration among St. Tammany Economic Development Corporation, Tangipahoa Economic Development, and Washington Economic Development Foundation. Through this initiative, the next wave of local entrepreneurs from all three parishes gain access to immersive education, dynamic networking opportunities, and mentorship from industry leaders, experienced founders, and capital investors - all delivered on the Northshore. STartUP Northshore is managed by St. Tammany Economic Development Corporation. For more information about STartUP Northshore, please visit startupnorthshore.com.

Media Contact:

- Cenzo Caronna, *Entrepreneur in Residence and STartUP Northshore Executive Director*
- vcaronna@sttammanyedc.org | 985.590.0045 | www.startupnorthshore.com

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