

BIG Idea Finalists and Mentor Contact Information

Finalist Information

Presentation Time: 10:50 am

BIG Idea Business Name: Conservation Covers

School: Watertown High School

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Mentor

Name: Bea Smith

Company: Northern Innovation and Startup Center

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Mentor's Job Title: Director

Company Description/Mentor Background:

The Northern Innovation & Startup Center strives to build a culture of tech entrepreneurship, create cohesive pathways, and offer events and workshops to help aspiring entrepreneurs turn their concepts into companies. By embracing technology, celebrating innovation, and encouraging a fail-forward mentality amongst entrepreneurs, we aim to strengthen and diversify the economy in Northeastern South Dakota.

I grew up in rural North Dakota and attended the University of North Dakota graduating with a degree in Marketing and Human Resources. I've had the opportunity to work for the following organizations: the Deadwood Mountain Grand, the Aberdeen Area Chamber of Commerce, Sanford Heath, and now the Northern Innovation & Startup Center. Working in the areas of Entertainment Coordinating, Director of Membership and Events, and Community Liaison. I enjoy love supporting and hearing the stories behind local small-town businesses. I have 2 children, Stella and Leo, and a fur baby Shi Tzu dog named Ruby.

Company website: www.northernstartupcenter.com

Project: Conservation Covers

Concept Overview: Do you need a warm blanket for winter, but can't find anything affordable? At Conservation Covers, I make my blankets out of recycled fabric from donated clothes. The blankets are soft, unique, and most importantly—affordable. Our focus is helping those in low income households have the choice to be warm and comfortable with little cost to them. Conservation Covers have a wide variety of blankets, and there's guaranteed to be one right for you!

Product or Service: My product at Conservation Covers is upcycled blankets made from donated clothes. My blankets are comfortable, unique and affordable. There will be donation bins for people to put clothes they no longer wear in. I will also collect unclaimed lost and found clothes from bins at schools after the school year ends with permission of the district. I will wash and cut the clothes into fabric squares, where I will then sew them together following a drawn blueprint-like pattern. They will be washed once more after being sewn into blankets and before being put on shelves to sell. Charitable organizations such as homeless shelters, will be able to order custom blankets in bulk for a discounted price. Which will be specially delivered right to them. Potential drawbacks may be not having enough donations or the right fabric for patterns, which would affect the constant flow of the production and the ability to make the patterns I draw come to life. I also hope to be able to give out blankets on Christmas for families that are unable to purchase presents for Christmas that year. Benefits of my product are being able to enjoy a comfortable environmentally friendly blanket at a low price. Unique aspects of my product are my blankets being made 100% of recycled clothes. I am able to take clothes that would otherwise end up wasted in a landfill for thousands of years to break down, and turn them into blankets to help low income families find comfortability.

Marketing Opportunity: Conservation Covers is within the Curtain and Linen Mills industry. The current size of the industry is \$4.7 billion. It is statistically shown that the growth is an average of 2.5% every 3 years. Trends

seen within the market are industrial sewing machines as well as natural fibers and fabrics. My ideal customer would be someone who is located within a 15 mile radius of Watertown South Dakota. Typically my customers would be female with the age range of 18 to 62. The income range for my customers will be \$50,000 or less per year. My customers will have interests in thrifting and comfort, and most will have little to no college education. In order to price my product, I have to take into consideration the cost of labor, and materials needed to produce the product. Thread to sew the material as well as the time and effort needed to perfect the product are important pricing factors. Equipment such as an industrial sewing machine and cash register systems are also something to consider when pricing my product. To advertise my product, I would put ads on Facebook to share with my family and friends who will then spread the word to their inner circles so more people become informed about my business. Something I would also do is hand out flyers to schools and local businesses to hang up for people to look at and talk about within the community of Watertown South Dakota.

Competition: Conservation covers. Choices customers may have other than purchasing products from Conservation Covers are either making their own blankets or shopping at thrift stores like the Peddlers Market. My product is unique because I use recycled clothes collected from donations to make blankets. My blankets are more unique than others because each blanket is hand sewn to match a hand drawn design. A strength of Conservation Covers is being a local business helping within the community I've known and been in for years. Another strength comes from my experience in sewing. I know how to stitch fabric in several different ways and make drawn patterns come to life, so I could easily start off not having to hire a seamstress until my business grows to need extra help. Conservation Cover's weaknesses are things like not having enough donations, running out of thread to make the blankets, and not having very many customers during the summer heat. Blankets are in higher demand during the fall and winter months, so sales will drop immensely during the summer. Other companies could compete fairly easily regarding quality of blankets, but competing within the price ranges for lower income households may be more difficult. Conservation Covers was designed to help less fortunate people have the comfort and quality of a high end, designer blanket for a price they can comfortably afford.

Management and Operations: In order for Conservation Covers to be successful, we will need both a seamstress and a designer. Employees need to be skilled in customer service. A seamstress has to know how to follow along the plan for the design and create it to the best of their ability making it as accurate as possible. Equipment needed in order to produce and sell are an industrial sewing machine and an up to date cash register system. Something else we will need is a drawing tablet. Some of our simple designs can be drawn on paper, but more intricate designs require the right technology to draw it to the circumstances of our vision. We have to be able to produce as much as we can when the product is in demand especially. We will also need a huge supply of thread to ensure we don't run out and become unable to produce the product. Conservation Cover's biggest expense will be thread. Thread is needed for each and every blanket, some needing more than others depending on the design. We have to be sure to not run out of thread as well. It is something that we will have to continually purchase to be able to keep the business up and running smoothly.