

Koolbridge Solar recognized again, 10-years after winning *Wilmington Business Journal* Coast Entrepreneur Award.

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2015 CEA Winners: Where Are They Now?



BRAND ASSURANCE

COMPANY: Brand Assurance aims to help apartment complexes keep residents happy and maintain good management.

YEAR FOUNDED: 2015

EMPLOYEES: 4

UPDATE: “Since we started, we have not lost a single customer, and we have added new customers,” founder Jim Kittridge said. Brand Assurance collects feedback from apartment complex residents and uses that to improve their experience. Happy residents are invited to provide testimonials. New features of Brand Assurance services include executive reports that enable upper management of apartment complex-es to see how on-site managers are performing.

PHOTO: Jim Kittridge, founder and CEO

CAROLINA GREEN BUILDING

COMPANY: Carolina Green Building was a construction company dedicated to renewable technologies.

YEAR FOUNDED: 2010

UPDATE: Carolina Green Building founder Robbie Sutton launched his company primarily as a solar installer and provider of energy services. It later expanded into a full-service construction company. Efforts to reach company officials were unsuccessful.

PHOTO: Robbie Sutton, founder

ELITE INNOVATIONS

COMPANY: Elite Innovations LLC is a product development firm.

YEAR FOUNDED: 2013

EMPLOYEES: 5

UPDATE: The firm has moved from Chandler's Wharf to the Murchison Building.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: "The biggest challenge that Elite has faced when trying to grow in Wilmington has been the talent pool in the area. Unfortunately, Wilmington and UNCW do not have a [soft-ware] engineering program. . . . However, through hard work, and constant recruiting and the willingness to take chances, we have been successful in this particular area of the state."

PHOTO: Andrew Williams, founder and CEO

THE HARRELSON CENTER

ORGANIZATION: The Harrelson Center is a centralized campus of nonprofit organizations specializing in humanitarian services that meet basic needs, address social determinants and offer hope, opportunity and empowerment.

YEAR FOUNDED: 2008

EMPLOYEES: 7

UPDATE: The center, located in the former New Hanover County detention center, now has 12 nonprofit organizations on campus and seven associate partners and Friends of the Center. Three partners have been on campus for more than 10 years. The center has \$3 million of its capital campaign goal for additional renovations, anticipating a renovation of the tower in 2019 as the Vicki Dull Annex. Among other accomplishments, the center opened Help Hub, a direct services emergency financial assistance program. "On a part time schedule we have advised over 4,000 neighbors in two years."

PHOTO: Vicki Dull, former executive director

FILMWERKS INTERNATIONAL

YEAR FOUNDED: 1999

EMPLOYEES: 100

COMPANY: Filmwerks International is a production equipment rental company.

UPDATE: "We have purchased 14 acres to place a 100,000-square-foot warehouse. Our growth has been exponential, and we needed more space to house an ever-growing inventory/fleet. On that same note, we plan to

have full-functioning branches in NYC and Las Vegas in 2018.”

GROWTH AND INNOVATION: “Our most unique product is our large format battery power supplies that have cut our fuel consumption within the broadcast industry, drastically. These units, called UPS (uninterrupted power supply), are proving their worth by utilizing utility power. These battery systems also condition utility power allowing us to use a much more economical source of electricity.”

PHOTO: Michael Satrazemis, CEO

GIGSALAD

YEAR FOUNDED: 2006

EMPLOYEES: 30

COMPANY: GigSalad offers a marketplace for booking bands, musicians, entertainers, speakers and services for parties, productions and events of all types and sizes.

UPDATE: The company is nearing 10 million all-time gig requests, growing from 3 million in 2015. GigSalad has more than 110,000 performers/vendors, up from 55,000 in 2015, and has been on Inc. Magazine’s list of the top 5000 growing companies from 2015 to 2017.

TOP THREE TIPS: BE AUTHENTIC; BUILD THINGS THAT MAKE SENSE; STICK TO YOUR CORE PRODUCT AND DON’T CHASE MONEY.

PHOTO: Steven Tetrault, co-founder

KOOLBRIDGE SOLAR INC.

COMPANY: Koolbridge Solar designs and creates electrical products that allow renewable energy to be integrated into homes in a manner that is more efficient and economical

YEAR FOUNDED: 2013

EMPLOYEES: 10

UPDATE: The company’s Smart Load Center patent was granted in February 2017 and is a foundational patent, giving the Koolbridge product very broad protection. The Smart Load Center is a device designed to allow customers to use their solar or wind energy sources along with utility-based energy in a complementary fashion.

TOP THREE TIPS: 1. Have common goals. 2. Be austere and frugal in the management of all available funds. 3. Recruit the smartest technical, marketing and business management people that have the most amount of successful work experience in a similar technology field.

PHOTO: J. Stephen Burnett, co-founder/ chairman/CEO

MIMIJUMI

COMPANY: mimijumi makes award-winning breastfeeding bottles.

YEAR FOUNDED: 2014

EMPLOYEES: 2

UPDATE: “Since receiving our CEA award in 2015, mimijumi has continued its mission to provide better feeding for all babies. In 2016, we built a robust digital community in the USA to reach moms where they live online. In 2017, we repurchased distribution rights in Europe and launched new websites in the UK, France, Germany and Italy.”

CHALLENGES: “The two biggest challenges we have faced have been 1. streamlining a complex global supply chain; and 2. unwinding damaging distribution agreements that preceded current management. . . .To streamline the supply chain, we toured every facility around the globe to meet every partner face-to-face to understand how and why processes existed.”

PHOTO: Brendan Collins, CEO

PERFORMANCE CULTURE

COMPANY: Performance Culture is an employee performance management software company.

YEAR FOUNDED: 2015

EMPLOYEES: 6

UPDATE: The company now has more than 6,000 users and more than 130 clients. “This past year, six healthcare organizations have implemented our software. We believe healthcare will be a great niche market. . . . We continue to bootstrap our company and have not raised capital outside of our Angel Investors.”

GROWTH AND INNOVATION: “Our software has significantly evolved since we won the CEA Award. Our initial software was a ‘proof of concept’ built on a platform as a service (Knack.com). We knew we would eventually have to migrate off this platform to scale our company. We began developing Performance Culture 2.0 in July 2016.”

PHOTO: Dallas Romanowski, CEO, and Melissa Phillippi, president

SURGILŪM

COMPANY: Surgilūm LLC is a medical products developer.

YEAR FOUNDED: 2013

EMPLOYEES: 7

UPDATE: Surgilūm’s flagship product is the RoboMarker, the world’s first self-leveling corneal marker with pre-inked disposable tips and an integrated fixation light. Its second product, the iLight Speculum, is an illuminated eyelid speculum. “We have enjoyed continued healthy sales with over 30 percent growth year over year . . . Word of mouth has become our growth driver until now but we do have plans to enter into advertising later this year to accelerate sales.”

A TOP TIP: “Know yourself. Do you have what it takes, and are you willing to really stretch to get there? Doing the impossible takes guts and, often times, a lot longer than anticipated.”

PHOTO: Alan Brown, founder