From big ideas to successful business ventures, a decade of Demo Day

ASU pitch competition helps student entrepreneurs thrive

By Alicia Barrón, ASU News
October 29, 2026

Sandul Gangodagamage has always been interested in tech startups and knew as a preteen that he wanted to start his own company. He read about companies like Apple and Google in tech magazines every day in school before starting his own, Legion Platforms, at just 15 years old.

But it wasn't until he joined Arizona State University's Venture Devils program and participated in its signature event — Demo Day — that he took his business to the next level. And he's just getting started.

Venture Devils is a program in ASU's J. Orin Edson Entrepreneurship + Innovation Institute. It offers ASU and Maricopa Community Colleges students resources to support entrepreneurial success, including community, mentorship, training programs and funding opportunities.

One of these opportunities is Demo Day, a biannual pitch competition created in 2016. For 10 years, Demo Day has been helping student entrepreneurs like Gangodagamage pitch their big ideas in front of investors for the chance to earn thousands of dollars in funding and receive mentorship from business leaders.

Now a senior at ASU double-majoring in computer science and business law, Gangodagamage has won first place in four Demo Days with two different ventures, receiving $60,000 in funding. He also won first place and a one-time $100,000 prize at the Inferno Invitational Startup Cup.

Show your support

Watch students pitch their ideas and help celebrate their success at the next Demo Day on Nov. 14 at ASU SkySong.

Register now

His company is a multiplayer gaming platform with 17 million users worldwide. It allows people with slow internet access to learn skills like math or science. The platform also allows users to build

their own games using its tools.

A total of 833 venture awards have been awarded through Demo Day — worth over $4.5 million. These numbers are evidence of ASU's sustained investment in student founders, with additional donors contributing to student awards over the last decade.

Brent Sebold, director of entrepreneurship and innovation at the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering and co-founder of Venture Devils, said the predictable cadence of Demo Days allows both founders and supporters to efficiently participate year after year.

“The current program leadership team continues to innovate and improve the model each year. It's exciting to think about the impact the program will continue to have,” he said.

Lauren Dunning, director for student outreach and engagement with Edson E+I, said Demo Day has been successful as a signature event experience because it meets student entrepreneurs where they are — whether that’s the idea stage or once a product is fully developed.

“Demo Day is a clear moment in time when you’re not alone in your journey as a student entrepreneur,” she said.

Helping student entrepreneurs thrive

Gangodagamage has participated in Demo Day every year since he was a freshman, making Venture Devils a signature part of his college experience. He says the guidance and mentorship he received from the program is invaluable.

“They teach you how to actually apply, how to get the best pitch going, because the really hard part is making a great pitch that can go and win the competition," Gangodagamage said.

He said Venture Devils is a supportive launchpad for student entrepreneurs. He felt confident the first time he pitched at Demo Day his freshman year — and won.

“I went up, pitched for the first time, people loved it, the audience was clapping, the judges loved it,” he said.

"Seeing a student engage so deeply so early and having a venture that has success is great,” Dunning said. “He's been able to continue to build something he was already doing in high school with non-dilutive resources from the university.”

Gangodagamage’s advice to students considering pursuing a business venture is to ask themselves: What if you don’t fail?

“ASU students have so much potential to go and change the world (and) build amazing companies,” he said.

Mentorship and connections

Carsyn Schuch graduated from ASU with a bachelor's degree in engineering management from the Fulton Schools of Engineering this past May. She always wanted to own her own company, so she took an entrepreneurship for engineering class as a sophomore. She was tasked with coming up with a product to pitch — an assignment that changed her entire career.

She wanted to make a product that mattered and helped people. Schuch's mom told her about Velcro crib sheets her grandmother designed when Schuch was a baby. Her mom said they were a lifesaver and suggested she pursue something similar, inspired by her 85-year-old grandmother's original design.

That's how Lazy Daisy Bed Sheets began. Schuch designed innovative Velcro bedsheets for older adults and people with disabilities who struggle with the task of putting on their fitted sheets and lifting their heavy mattresses.

Schuch met with her mentor, Wayne Smith, biweekly to work on her pitch deck and practice her presentation.

"It really gave me an understanding of what business life would actually be like," she said.

Smith encouraged her to look at customer segments and do customer discovery, where she discovered that older people in particular had trouble with fitted sheets. Staff at senior living facilities and hospitals were having the same problems — resulting in back injuries.

Schuch was very nervous at her first Demo Day. She arrived early to hear other pitches and felt imposter syndrome.

"I was so intimidated by all the amazing products, and a lot of them were so different from mine. A lot of them were AI, tech and high tech," she said. "But after pitching and answering questions, it was like, 'OK, I did that.'"

Bailey Johnson, senior program manager of student outreach and engagement with Edson E+I, said Demo Days allow students to practice and build confidence in a supportive environment that's rich with resources.

"You can clearly see the growth in their work," Johnson said. "They feel more well equipped to participate in things like this and more confident to participate."

Schuch won in her category and credits ASU's entrepreneurship programs with helping her succeed.

"I will brag to anybody and everybody about these programs at ASU because they completely changed my life," she said.

Lazy Daisy Bed Sheets is in its final design phase. The first product to launch will be the crib sheets. Schuch has an issued patent for the crib sheets, with her grandmother, Georgia, listed as a co-inventor. When Schuch needed a prototype for her pitch, her grandmother showed her how to sew, and they made the first prototype together. The company name is currently transitioning from Lazy Daisy Bed Sheets to Georgia Bloom, named after Schuch's grandmother.

A partner in leveling up

Dunning said students shouldn’t have to choose between being an entrepreneur or being a student. Through programs like Venture Devils and Demo Day, Edson E+I supports students in pursuing both options, and advances ASU’s commitment to taking responsibility for the communities it serves.

Johnson said all the students who have participated in Venture Devils and Demo Day come away with entrepreneurial skills they can use in any future career — whether they pursue a venture or not.

“It's very much a skill-building opportunity for them to take along with them with their little backpack of tools as they continue on post college,” she said.

This story originally appeared on ASU News.

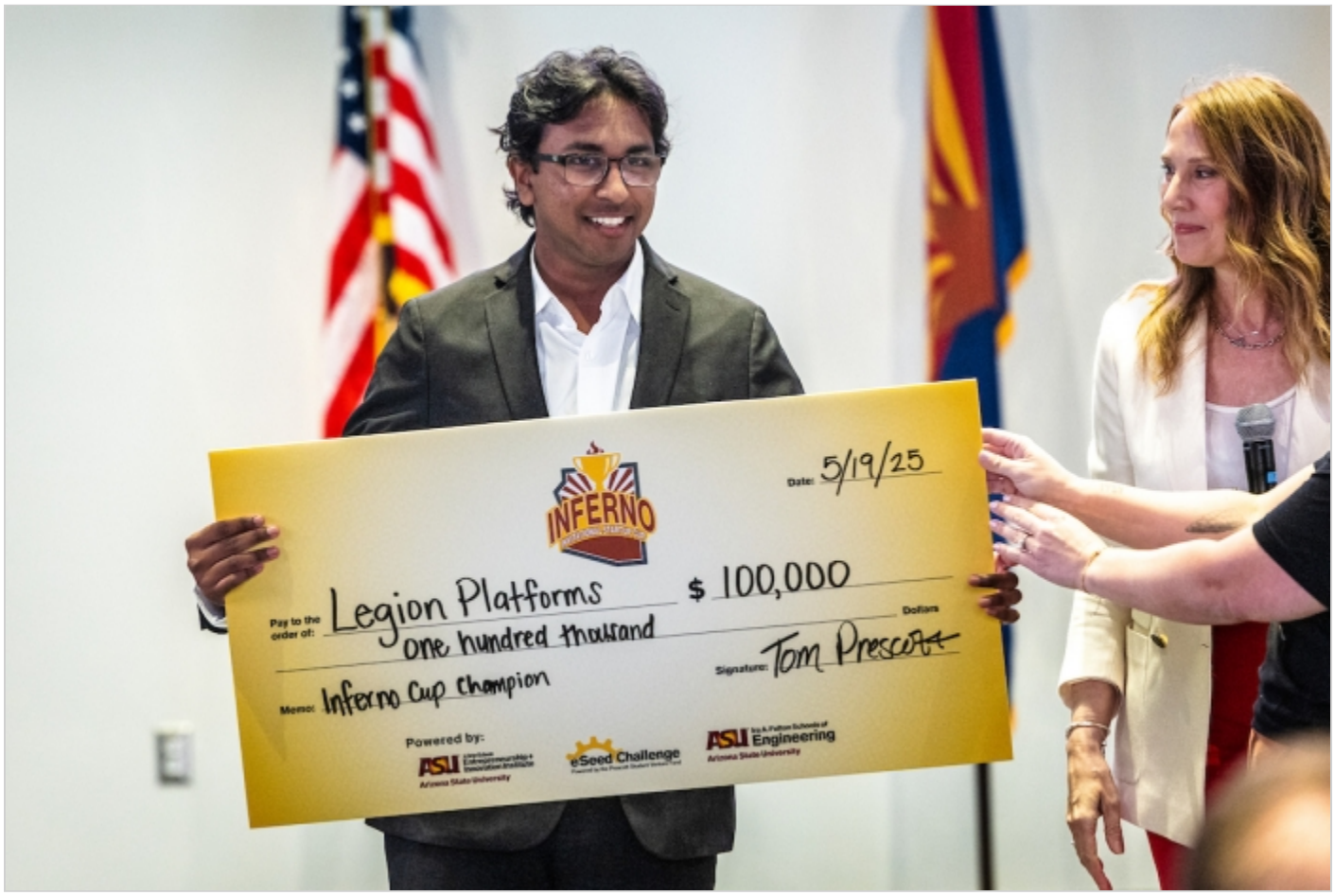
Main image



Captavate COO Michael Li (right), CEO Any Bizuneh and Sparky pose for a photo after being awarded $40,000 during Venture Devils Demo Day at SkySong in Scottsdale on April 22, 2023.

Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University

Text image(s)



Sandul Gangodagamage accepts his big check for his video game company Legion Platforms, designed for gamers with slow internet, from ASU's Joy Griffin at the inaugural Inferno Invitational Startup Cup entrepreneurial pitch competition in 2025. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News



Carsyn Schuch created Lazy Daisy Bed Sheets for older adults and people with disabilities who struggle with the task of putting on their fitted sheets. Photo by Quinton Kendall/ASU Knowledge Enterprise

Gallery



Keep the F.A.I.T.H. founder Ceci Shell pitches her company designed to challenge and empower high school athletes at the Venture Devils Demo Day at SkySong, on Friday, Nov. 30, 2018.



William Mabrey pitches his LabRat application that connects researchers with a large population of participants at ASU Venture Devils Demo Day, at SkySong, on Friday, April 19, 2019.



Knot-Ed's founder and CEO Leandres Christopher makes her company's pitch for monthly-delivered hair products for Black women, at the Venture Devils Demo Day at SkySong, on Friday, Nov. 30, 2018.



Tanner Wills, CEO and founder of POKIT, is awarded $10,000 for his startup at Venture Devils Demo Day, on April 29, 2022, at SkySong in Scottsdale.



Kelly-Ann McCleary (right) is awarded $3,000 for her startup Hairtage at Venture Devils Demo Day, on April 29, 2022, at SkySong in Scottsdale.