

COVERstory

Participants put to test with Lever's first Intrapreneur Challenge

Six established companies developing innovations for new business growth

BY BRAD JOHNSON

A lot of learning is taking place during Lever's first Intrapreneur Challenge.

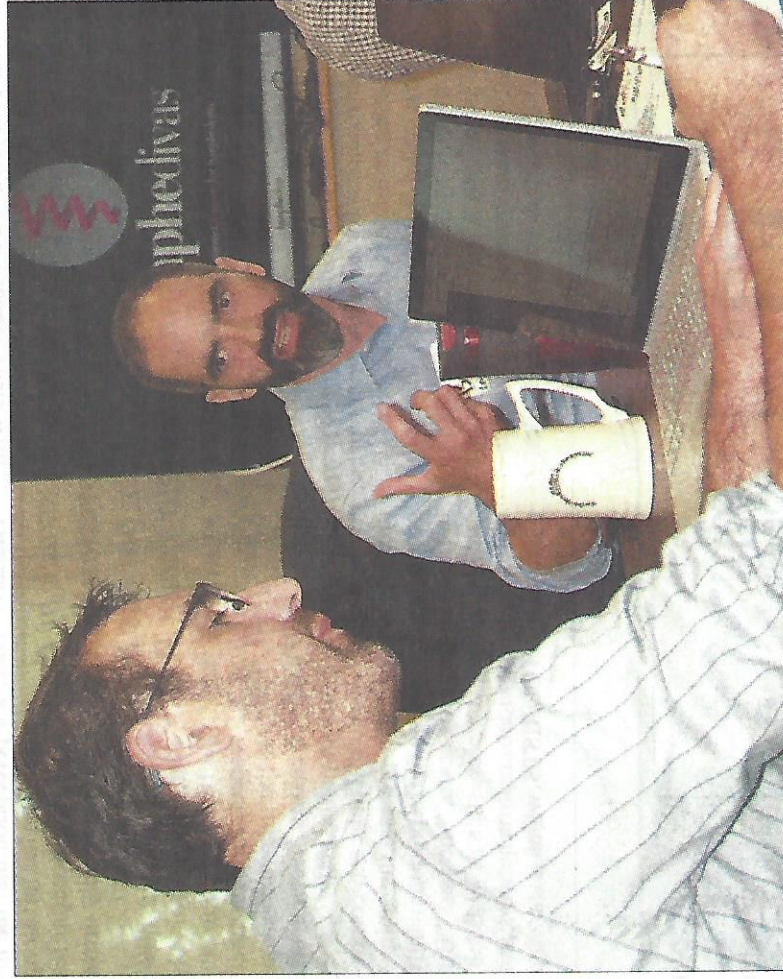
Teams from six established businesses and organizations in the Berkshires are deep into a three-month process of developing their respective innovation projects involving a new product or service with the potential to bring additional top-line growth and job creation to their existing operations.

These projects will be front-and-center at Lever's upcoming Innovation Summit, a two-day program of events and activities being held to celebrate innovation in the Berkshires (see *related story on page 1*).

The summit will kick off on Oct. 3 with a final pitch competition for participants in the Intrapreneur Challenge, in which a panel of judges will select the innovation with the most potential for top-line growth and job creation. A \$25,000 cash prize, along with additional support and guidance from Lever, will be awarded to the winning company for further development and roll-out of their project.

While this process is similar to the pitch competitions that Lever has been holding for start-ups in manufacturing and health technology sectors (see *related story on page 18*), the Intrapreneur Challenge is breaking new ground as what may be the first of its kind to bring together a group of well-established, successful businesses from diverse sectors as competitors.

"We have not found a program similar to this," said Brent Filson, director of operations and programming at Lever, a five-year-old North Adams-based nonprofit organization



At a workshop for participants in the Intrapreneur Challenge, LymphedIVAs President Josh Levin (left) makes note of suggestions from Lever's Brent Filson regarding Levin's pitch presentation for the innovation being developed by his company. Several participants in the program said that feedback from Lever staff – as well as from fellow participants – has been very helpful in refining their business models.

that provides a range of support services for regional start-ups and entrepreneurs.

As such, he said, the participating companies are engaged in an experiment of sorts in terms of how well Lever's established process of working with promising start-ups in the development of their business models will fit with existing successful businesses.

"I'm really happy with the results so far," said Filson in a late August interview. "These are all companies that are moving forward with innovations that wouldn't be happening outside of their involvement in this program."

He noted that the projects being developed are not aimed at reducing costs through enhanced operational efficiency and productivity. Rather, the focus is on fostering innovation and entrepreneurial thinking within the company to identify and develop new products or services that have the potential to generate new revenue streams.

The companies participating in the Intrapreneur Challenge include:

- B&B Micro Manufacturing Inc., a custom tiny-home building business in Adams that produces RVIA-certified tiny houses.

The innovation being developed by B&B involves small, single-module turnkey homes built in Adams and then permanently affixed to a foundation.

- Boyd Technologies, a Lee-based company that provides material sourcing, product development and advanced manufacturing services to medical device and life sciences companies. Boyd Technologies is developing a proprietary online tool that makes it easier to access information required for new medical device regulatory approval.

- LTI Group, a Pittsfield-based producer of specialized laminated glass and polymer products for architectural, security and decorative purposes. LTI Group's innovation involves development of bullet-rated windows for U.S. Marine Corps vehicles that are resistant to delamination, which reduces visibility and is a leading reason that military vehicles are removed from service.

- Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health in Stockbridge, a nonprofit organization specializing in wellness retreats, yoga and Ayurvedic teacher training, and the RISE resiliency training program. Kripalu is seeking to launch an online version of its RISE program that would broaden its access for schools, hospitals, corporate offices and other core constituencies.

- LymphedIVAs, a Pittsfield-based company that designs and produces medically correct and fashionable compression sleeves for breast cancer survivors with lymphedema. LymphedIVAs is developing a new line of medical compression-wear products to serve a broader market.

- Zogics, a global online retailer based in Lenox that supplies commercial gyms and facilities with products needed to maintain their business. The innovation being developed by Zogics is a new service to certify workplace wellness programs, which would allow companies to showcase their commit-