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# Bobcat Entrepreneurs

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MARCH 31, 2015 BY KATECLAUSEN

## 2015 Innovation Awards to Continue to Promote Southeast Ohio Entrepreneurs



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Ohio University's Innovation Awards Gala returns to Athens on March 31. This year marks the event's third annual iteration, which recognizes creative development in southeast Ohio in five categories and awards the prestigious Konneker Medal for Commercialization and Entrepreneurship.

The Innovation Awards are hosted by TechGROWTH Ohio, an organization dedicated to promoting entrepreneurship and technology-based business activity in the region. This year the Innovation Awards will bestow honors for Entrepreneur of the Year, Outstanding Faculty Innovation, Outstanding Woman in Innovation, Outstanding Social Innovation, and Outstanding Student Innovation, categories that reflect the gala's continued commitment to promoting diversity in southeast Ohio's entrepreneurship.

Award recipients have a chance to network with other innovators in their area. The event's publicity also spreads awareness of their developments.

In 2014, the gala recognized Chad Mourning and Scott Nykl, founders of Affine Technologies, with the Outstanding Student Innovation award. Mourning credits the award with giving him the third-party validation needed to assure him of his goals with Affine Technologies.

"Any time you have to put down in words what you accomplished in a given year, it really adds to your perspective," said Mourning, a Ph.D. candidate in electrical engineering and computer science at Ohio University.

Gerardine Botte, Russ Professor of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering at Ohio University, won the Outstanding Faculty Innovation award in 2014 for her work developing a clean coal-to-graphene process. She expressed appreciation for the awards' advertising possibilities.

"One of the exciting things is that the awards are reviewed by a panel from many places," Botte said. "Some of them are patent lawyers, or people less connected with innovation, so the fact that [the coal-to-graphene process] got recognized by them means there is value here and that makes people think about the process more."

Mathew Blankenhorn, the vice-chairman of the board of directors at Aluminastic Corporation and recipient of the Outstanding Green Innovation award in 2014, cited the gala with raising awareness as well. Aluminastic develops specialty nano-composite metals produced from 100 percent recycled materials.

"Because of this award we were able to educate the public; most people did not understand that 100 percent recycled aluminum products were possible," he said.

The awards also can have a social impact. Michelle Greenfield, the CEO of Third Sun Solar, received the 2014 Outstanding Woman in Innovation award. Her company is a full-service provider of clean energy systems in the Midwest and is recognized as a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise through

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Ohio's Unified Certification Program.

Greenfield believes recognition of disadvantaged people in business can begin to shift the power structure of industries such as solar energy, which is a traditionally male-dominated field.

"The public recognition of our solar company, run by a woman, will hopefully have a ripple effect in influencing more women to look at solar as a possible field for a job or career," she said.

Greenfield also expressed hope that the recognition would be a step toward driving solar power into the mainstream.

The Awards Gala brings together a powerful group of entrepreneurs and inventors for an evening of celebration and mingling that pays off later, Botte said.

"I look forward to collaborating with all those other faculty innovators and all the other people in the Innovation Awards," Botte said. "[The awards] might create a good synergistic group of people that end up working together later." For example, she and Blankenhorn are planning a joint Small Business Innovation Research proposal with Ohio University next year.

This year's gala will take place in the Baker Center Ballroom, beginning with a reception at 6 p.m. to be followed by dinner and an awards ceremony at 7 p.m. Finalists for 2015 have been announced, and can be viewed [here](http://www.ohio.edu/voinovichschool/article.cfm?customel_datapageid_1792195=2515824) ([http://www.ohio.edu/voinovichschool/article.cfm?customel\\_datapageid\\_1792195=2515824](http://www.ohio.edu/voinovichschool/article.cfm?customel_datapageid_1792195=2515824)).

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