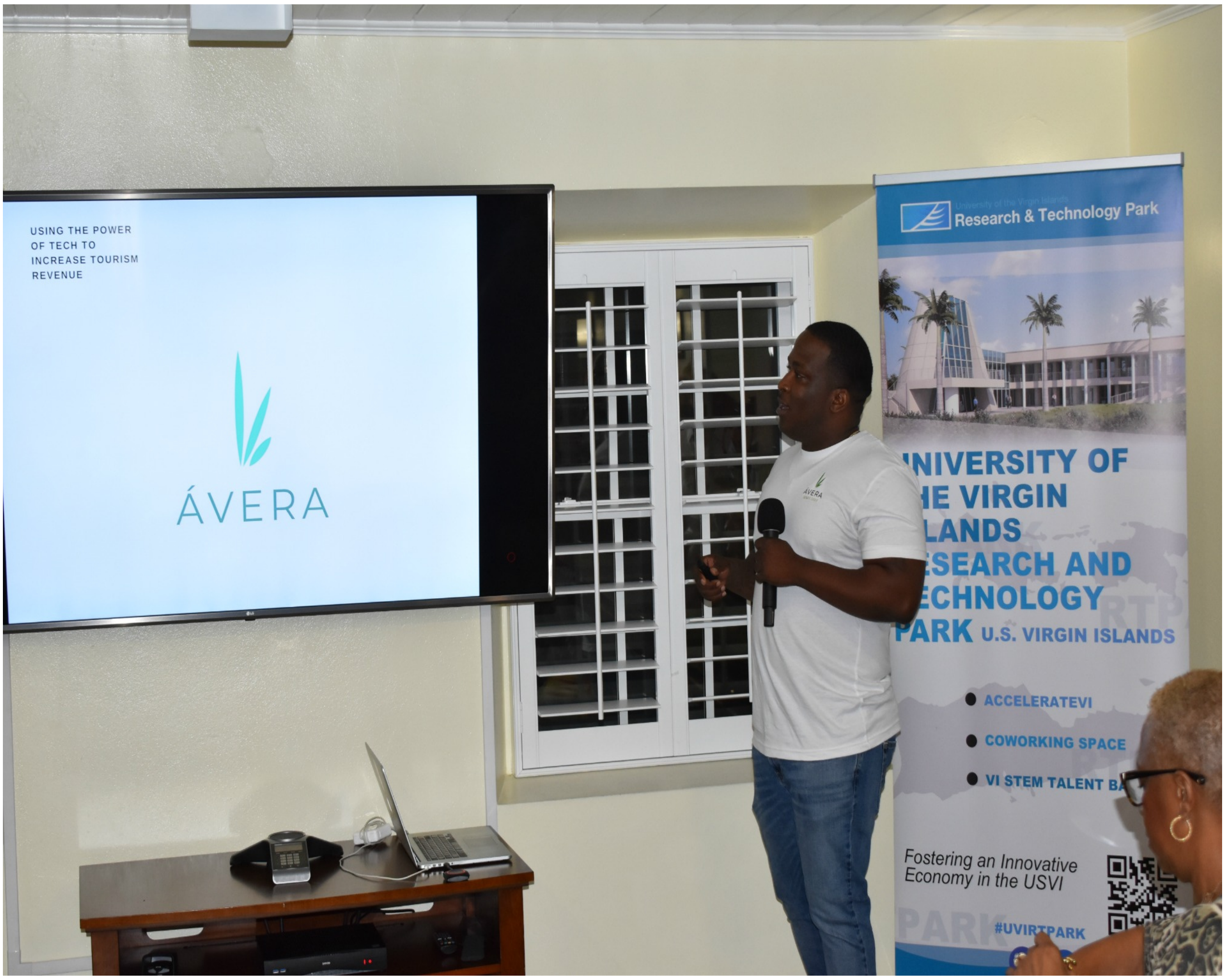
The Virgin Islands Consortium

Early-Stage Companies Wow Onlookers During RTPark's First 'Demo Day' Event At Company House Hotel

Technology / **Published On October 25, 2019 10:26 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert October 25, 2019



ST. CROIX -- A mix of supporters, curious individuals and, most critically, investors crammed a room on the second floor of the Company House Hotel in downtown Christiansted on Thursday evening, to see -- some for the first time -- what the eight companies that are part of the Research and Technology Park's (RTPark) Accelerator Program have been working on.

Called Demo Day, the event gives founders of the cohort an opportunity to pitch their company in hopes of gaining interest and funding from investors -- be it angel investors or venture capitalists. Normally a Demo Day is performed after the completion of an accelerator program, but Eric Sonnier, director of business attraction and entrepreneurship at RT Park, told the Consortium during the event that the RTPark utilized a different strategy that would allow the Park to guide the companies through the entire process -- from pitching their offerings and, if investment interest is won, how to close the deal.

"We've done Demo Day about two-thirds of the way through the program so that after the founders meet with potential investors, we can then help them through the process," Mr. Sonnier said. "So whether they get a term sheet or they're getting certain questions and they need to put together a due diligence room, we can help with that so that it's not a, 'okay, here's your Demo Day, talk to people but the program is over. Good luck.' So this is what today is all about."

The last third of the program is for training on interaction with potential investors, which seeks to help the cohort to understand the questions they will most likely be asked, putting together a deal room, understanding a term sheet, valuations "and things that you will need to know as they start to get into these conversations," Mr. Sonnier said.

"A lot of times you only have one chance to make an impression with a potential investor, so we want to be able to help out in any way that we can," he said.

The eight companies that are part of the first cohort are:

- GRIND Basketball – Sports Tech
- Harbor Shoppers – E-Commerce
- Qore – Financial Technology
- Promo Juice – Media & Promotions
- ShoreIQ – Web Development
- OFT Labs – Health & Wellness
- FarmPod – Sustainable Agriculture
- Avera – Health & Wellness

Kadeem Pemberton, a founder of Avera, described the company as facilitating the expedition of "the current marijuana acquisition through telemedicine and also help[ing] local governments increase tourism spending by up to 300 percent." Mr. Pemberton gave tourism statistics including the number of visits to the Caribbean in the first three months of 2019, which he said was 9.1 million. "We left up to $7 billion on the table through medicinal marijuana," he said. Mr. Pemberton said over 60 percent of the Caribbean was moving toward the legalization of medicinal marijuana, with Avera, he said, "speaking to 100 percent of them."

Mr. Pemberton said his company was in a good place to succeed because it is built with the latest legislation on medicinal marijuana as a basis of operation; because it's part of the "best RTPark in the Caribbean,"; and because the company's API "is built around helping local farmers and entrepreneurs build equity through banking compliance with our tech."

Mr. Pemberton also said that all of the 32 licenses expected to be approved in the territory -- including dispensaries, manufacturers and cultivators -- will have to adapt

Avera's technology to be regulated in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Giving an example of how the company will make money, Mr. Pemberton spoke of a tourist arriving in the territory. This tourist, who wants to access the local medicinal marijuana market, would then setup an appointment at a cost of $50 through the Avera app (the fee was negotiated between Avera and local physicians, according to Mr. Pemberton). Then there's a $25 tourist pass, which Mr. Pemberton said is based off of the local law -- a fee that he said was negotiated between Avera and the local government. Avera also gets a cut at the dispensary level, Mr. Pemberton said, because the company's tech will be utilized during that process as well.

"Our goal is in five years to dominate the Caribbean," said a confident Mr. Pemberton. "We want to become the Caribbean's first super app; we have no choice because we have the RT Park."

He added, "Our end goal is to generate $300 million in the next five years and I'm being very conservative. We want to be the first unicorn out of the Caribbean, so we're aiming for a billion [dollars.]"