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NORFOLK

Between Friday and Sunday, Claude Nix slept for just three hours.

He was too busy creating software, talking to investors and gathering partners. If his dream business - Web-based software for sailing regattas - was going to get off the ground, he'd have to squeeze every possible benefit out of [Start Norfolk](#).

"It's been stressful," Nix said with a grin on Sunday morning. "But we've been making it happen."

The event was the first of its kind to be held in Norfolk, organizer Zack Miller said. Similar events have generated businesses in San Francisco, Chicago and other cities.

This, he said, was Norfolk's chance.

The idea is to put locals with ideas for Web-based businesses in the same room, so their skills can jell. Add mentors and speakers, make the whole event a competition, and the result might be a set of startups that could boost the whole city.

"The goal is to get the seeds planted. A few companies will be born on Sunday," said Brennan Dunn, founder of Norfolk consulting company and event sponsor We Are Titans. "People who haven't worked together before will start. The goal is to incubate good ideas and see what germinates."

Start Norfolk was held on Old Dominion University's campus Friday through Sunday. About

135 people brought their business ideas; of those, about eight were picked as the best.

Attendees formed teams and began building. Mentors asked logistical questions: Is there a demand for this product? What niche does it fill? How will it make money?

One team built a social networking site to connect buyers and sellers of local and sustainable foods. Nearby, another team worked on a smartphone app that can save knitters time by counting their stitches. Knitters simply snap a picture with their smartphone, and the app does the counting.

"We're learning how to execute our ideas," team member Sandra Goad said. "That's the important thing."

Other projects included Bike Share Norfolk, which plans to have racks of bikes for rent by the spring; Tap Force, which gives tech-savvy young adults a chance to earn money with their trouble-shooting skills; and Evac-U-App, which links people who need to evacuate with their cities' command centers.

Scott McDermott said his Apocalapps is meant to teach survival skills through online gaming. Players start by surviving a comet strike and later work their way up to a zombie apocalypse.

"They will come," McDermott said. "The zombie app market is very crowded."

Later in the day, judges picked TutoriALL as the winner for its smartphone app to create and upload tutorials using video, photos and text. The team won about \$10,000 in cash, plus startup legal and accounting services and rent for a work space. The knitting app won second place and Apocalapps won third place. Both of those teams will receive accounting and legal services and money for rent.

Entrepreneurs gather in Norfolk to spawn startups

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