

## CORNELL CHRONICLE



College of Veterinary Medicine

Student groups work on their projects for the Cornell Animal Health Hackathon on the second floor of eHub in Collegetown.

# Hackathon inspires solutions for animal health - and sticky dog poop

By Susan Kelley | February 1, 2018

The owners of long-haired dogs have an unsavory problem that is not widely discussed, because, frankly, it's kind of gross: Small clumps of feces get stuck in their dogs' fur after the dogs defecate.

A team of students came up with a simple, innovative solution at the 2018 Cornell Animal Health Hackathon

(<https://animalhealthhackathon2018.splashthat.com/>): HygenaPet, a \$10 spray of beeswax and carnauba wax that owners can spritz on their dogs' backsides, making the poop slide right off the fur.

The HygenaPet team bounded away with the grand prize at the hackathon, which took place Jan. 26-28.

“The benefits [of HygenaPet] are really great,” said team member Adam Itzkowitz '20, an engineering major, during the team's presentation. “You've got these

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The grand prize winners of the Cornell Animal Health Hackathon celebrate their victory with Dr. Lorin Warnick, Ph.D. '94, the Austin O. Hooey Dean of Veterinary Medicine. From left, Adam Itzkowitz '20, Prathamesh Bang '20, Bruce Ahn '18, Warnick, Lucian Chown '19, Woo Jeon '18, Elvis Ahn '20, and Ohad Koronyo, '20.

happy, healthy, irritation-free dogs. You don't have to go to the groomer to get hair trimmed ... . We're avoiding the spread of germs that can be embedded in the fur, and owners can reclaim their clean homes.”

Their decidedly low-tech product beat out a field of 24 teams, many of which presented high-tech solutions to animal health problems.

Co-hosted by the College of Veterinary Medicine and Entrepreneurship at Cornell, the competition invited students from any college or major to come up with innovative solutions in the animal health sector. The event kicked off with a conference on emerging trends and the future of animal health and health care services.

Over the weekend, 127 students – representing every school and college on campus – formed teams, and mentors provided feedback and guidance. The event culminated in 10 teams presenting their concepts, vying for \$5,000 in cash and prizes.

Each business idea had to address a problem in one of three categories: client and customer experience; diagnostics, prevention and treatment; or clinical workflow and compliance. The judges evaluated the product or service on novelty, scale of impact and viability.

In the customer experience category, HygenaPet stood apart as extremely marketable, said judge Sue Wylegala, DVM '88. “We saw its use in many applications, and we thought it would be a highly profitable product,” she said.

The idea for HygenaPet came from two team members, Bruce Ahn '18 and Elvis Ahn '20. The brothers own an American Eskimo dog who is susceptible to the problem HygenaPet aims to solve.

Itzkowitz said the biggest obstacle the team had to overcome was choosing a final idea. They had considered an online forum that would connect dogs that stayed at home for long periods of time with nursing homes in need of therapy dogs, and a marketplace for pet insurance.

But eventually they realized those ideas weren't innovative enough, didn't solve a real need, and would have taken significant time and skill to prototype, he said.

“Eventually, we returned to the problem that Bruce and Elvis had proposed earlier because of its novelty, simplicity and prevalence,” Itzkowitz said. “It provided us with the perfect opportunity to solve a problem that we knew was widespread but was not being talked about or fixed.”

The winner of the diagnostics and therapeutics category, Encompass, is a software program that improves communication between veterinarians and their clients.

Two groups tied in the customer experience category; both produced humane traps complete with video, apps and alerts that signal an animal has been caught. CATcher is for stray cats, while Squeak is aimed at mice in the home.

Cow Finder won the workflow category, with a system using low-energy Bluetooth beacons that helps farmers find a specific cow in their herd. A red light embedded on a chip in a cow's ear illuminates when a farmer or veterinarian is looking for it.

“The ideas they came up with are absolutely outstanding,” said judge Steve Ireland, director of marketing for Pet Partners. “I want to see some of them take it and run with it.”

Other judges were Chris Brooks of Boehringer Ingelheim and Dr. Meg Thompson, director of Cornell University Hospital for Animals.

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