M&T Announces Winners of Prince George's County, MD Small Business Accelerator Program

Kiara Scott awarded $5,000 grand prize to support Free Money Meister

Largo, MD, Nov. 16, 2026 — Kiara Scott of Free Money Meister was awarded the $5,000 grand prize in the small business accelerator pitch competition hosted by M&T Bank (NYSE: MTB) in partnership with Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation (PGCEDC). This program aims to equip entrepreneurs with essential skills and guidance to build resilient businesses, drive economic growth in Prince George's County and create generational wealth for their families.

Scott founded Free Money Meister, an AI-powered scholarship platform that helps students discover funding opportunities to make higher education more affordable. Inspired by her own experience earning two degrees without student loan debt, Scott developed the platform to help students identify overlooked scholarships, prioritize funding opportunities and manage the application process.

"I'm incredibly grateful for this opportunity and for the support we've received throughout the accelerator," said Kiara Scott. "The guidance, resources and connections have helped me think bigger about what Free Money Meister can become and how we can reach more students. Thank you to M&T Bank and PGCEDC for supporting local entrepreneurs and helping us grow."

The competition was the culmination of an eight-week program launched on September 24. This program covered topics such as business planning, capital sourcing, financial management, marketing, and branding. The program concluded on November 12 with a pitch competition, followed by the announcement of awards, funded by M&T Bank.

Wesley Pinkney of Plank Owner Pizza Bar won the second-place prize of $3,500, and Tonia Akapo of FaithLinks won the third-place prize of $1,500.

Vickie Mejia, M&T Bank Retail Sales Manager for Greater Washington, said "Every small business represents a dream, an opportunity, and the potential to create lasting impact. Through this program, we're investing in the people behind those businesses, equipping them with the knowledge, resources, and connections to turn ambition into sustainable growth. These entrepreneurs are helping shape the future of PG County, creating jobs, strengthening communities, and building generational wealth. We're proud to be part of their journey and excited to see what they accomplish next."

To qualify, businesses had to be based in Prince George's County and surrounding areas, in operation for 2–5 years and generate approximately $50,000–$500,000 in annual revenue. M&T Bank also offers similar accelerator programs in Montgomery, Howard, and Frederick counties, as well as Baltimore City.

"Small businesses are at the heart of Prince George's County's economic vitality, and supporting entrepreneurs is an investment in our community's future," said Ingrid S. Watson, President and CEO of PGCEDC. "Programs like this give business owners the tools, confidence and connections to grow and succeed. We're grateful to M&T Bank for its partnership and commitment to helping our local businesses thrive and creating more opportunities for residents across the county."

About M&T Bank
M&T Bank Corporation is a financial holding company headquartered in Buffalo, New York. M&T's principal banking subsidiary, M&T Bank, provides banking products and services with a branch and ATM network spanning the eastern U.S. from Maine to Virginia and Washington, D.C. Trust-related services are provided in select markets in the U.S. and abroad by M&T's Wilmington Trust-affiliated companies and by M&T Bank. For more information on M&T Bank, visit www.mtb.com.

About Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation
The Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation (PGCEDC) is the County's lead economic development organization, dedicated to cultivating a strong local economy that supports the growth and prosperity of entrepreneurs and businesses. Through business development, small business services, accelerator programs, workforce initiatives and strategic partnerships, PGCEDC helps businesses start, grow and expand, creating jobs and strengthening communities throughout Prince George's County. For more information, visit www.pgcedc.com.

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