

Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council celebrates innovation and community at TechNite

The Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council (RBTC) held its annual TechNite last night at The Inn at Virginia Tech. TechNite is an annual celebration of the local technology community. The night was full of networking, celebrating accomplishments, and recognizing innovative companies and people in the Roanoke and Blacksburg area.

The keynote speaker was VT alumnus Michael Rihani, current product manager at Tesla, former product manager at Apple, and co-creator of Koofers. Rihani shared with the crowd his passion for community, especially positive and innovative people, as well as his passion for Bitcoin technology. During his reunion with the Virginia Tech community this week, Rihani generously donated to every library and school in Roanoke and Blacksburg the book, *The Bitcoin Standard: The Decentralized Alternative to Central Banking*.

“TechNite 2021 was a celebration of resiliency and accomplishments in innovation throughout our vibrant tech community,” said Erin Burcham, Executive Director of the Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council. “It was an honor to host Michael Rihani, a former TechNite *Entrepreneur of the Year* winner, and to share his passions and accomplishments with our community. We are so proud of all the TechNite award winners and stand amazed at all that this community offers to the world of technology.”

The following entrepreneurs and companies were honored during the awards ceremony at TechNite.

- **Micro Harmonics**, *Rising Star of the Year*, which recognizes a local technology company whose “star is rising.” Micro Harmonics produces millimeter wave products in military applications such as compact range radar, imaging, covert communication, and chemical and bio-agent detection, as well as in scientific instrumentation for chemical spectroscopy, biomaterial analysis, radio astronomy, biomedical systems, portal security scanners, and high-frequency data links.
- **Sonu Singh**, *Entrepreneur of the Year*, which recognizes a leader who exemplifies what it means to be a risk-taker in the technology field. Singh is President and CEO at the 1901 Group, a company transforming the delivery of IT services through the use of enterprise managed services leveraging the cloud to securely monitor, manage, and optimize complex IT environments.
- **Daniel Smith and Matt Welborn, Entos, Inc.**, *Innovator of the Year*, which recognizes an individual, a team, or an organization that has blazed new trails in the areas of research and innovation. Entos, Inc. offers breakthrough AI-driven chemistry for medicine.
- **Amy Ankrum and Amy White** (co-recipients), *Regional Leadership Award*, which recognizes a member who succeeds in the workplace, but also leads by example by contributing significantly to the RBTC community. Ankrum was president and CEO of Qualtrax before its acquisition earlier this year by U.K.-based Ideagen, for which she now works as senior vice-president North America. White is dean of Virginia Western Community College’s STEM program.
- **FoxGuard Solutions**, *Company of the Year*, which recognizes a Roanoke or New River Valley company committed to advancing our region’s technology community and can demonstrate excellence in its people, programs, and projects within its industry. FoxGuard designs, manufactures, and integrates innovative cybersecurity, computing, and regulatory compliance solutions used in critical infrastructure markets.

- **Fralin Biomedical Research Institute and Carilion Clinic**, *Ruby Award*, which recognizes an outstanding member that has proven to be a brilliant and valuable asset to the Roanoke-Blacksburg region. Both companies were honored for their mission of protecting the region during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Doug Juanerena**, *RBTC Hall of Fame*. Juanerena was founder and CEO of three technology startups over a 35-year career, as well as Valleys Innovation Council board co-chair, and mentor to three successful RAMP technology startups.

TechNite was a highlight of the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center's "Game Changer Week," which brought together industry disruptors through a variety of events held virtually and in person across the region. [See photos of the award recipients here](#). The Roanoke-Blacksburg Technology Council is an affiliate of Verge, a collaborative strategic alliance established to grow the region's innovation economy. To learn more, visit vergeva.org.