



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **GENIUS NY Teams Continue to Grow, Hire New Employees** *New employees help startup companies meet increasing customer demands*

**Syracuse, NY-** GENIUS NY teams from round one have marked a significant milestone in their growth cycle with the hiring of three fulltime employees. Since relocating their early stage startups to The Tech Garden in January, the six GENIUS NY companies have gained traction on improving their technology and outreach. Taking advantage of their initial funding, Ascent AeroSystems, Automodality, and SkyOp have been focused on making new hires to fill necessary roles and continue to meet growth targets.

"The companies that took part in the first round of the GENIUS NY competition are already supporting the region's goal of establishment of Central New York as the global hub of the burgeoning Unmanned Aerial Systems industry, a goal that is at the heart of the CNY Rising plan, fueling innovation and creating high-quality jobs," said Howard Zemsky, Empire State Development President, CEO & Commissioner.

Ascent AeroSystems, which designs, manufactures, sells, and supports small unmanned aerial vehicles, hired Derrick Miller to assist with product development and quality assurance during the company's manufacturing process of Sprite Drones. Miller is a graduate of the Rochester Institute of Technology's Engineering Program with a focus in Aerospace engineering and brings 17 years of drone piloting experience.

Automodality, focused on inspection of infrastructure assets, hired Joe Risico to its management team as the new chief operating officer. Risico was formally head of business development for Ecovative and has a law degree from Columbia Law School, and a degree in Accounting and Economics from New York University.

SkyOp, a drone pilot training company, hired Sarah McHugh as their full time sales development director. McHugh has a background in media sales and marketing and will focus on expanding SkyOp's Education segment.

"The growth of our company is accelerating due to input of capital and amazing connections made through GENIUS NY," said Brian Pitre, co-founder of SkyOp. "We've added our first full time employee and are in the process of interviewing our second."

GENIUS NY, which is funded by Empire State Development in a model similar to Buffalo's highly successful 43North program, and administered by CenterState CEO, invests more than \$3 million in six companies over the course of the year-long competition – making it the largest business

accelerator competition for the Unmanned Aerial Systems industry in the world. The advancement of the GENIUS NY program builds on the progress of CNY Rising, the region's award-winning strategic plan to generate robust economic growth and community development.

"We are starting to see the growth and traction of these early stage technology companies in New York," said Jon Parry, director of GENIUS NY. "Funding, industry networking, and a significant number of resources provided by GENIUS NY and The Tech Garden have allowed these six companies to accelerate their business and take advantage of the impressive unmanned systems ecosystem that is developing in Central New York and the Mohawk Valley. The GENIUS NY program is proving to be a valuable resource for this emerging industry and we look forward to selecting six innovative teams later this year for GENIUS NY 2.0."

Applications for GENIUS NY 2.0 are open until October 1, 2017. Entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses focused on unmanned systems in hardware, software and analytics can apply to compete for three grand prizes valued at up to \$1 million, \$600,000 and \$400,000.

To learn more about GENIUS NY and to apply, visit [www.geniusny.com](http://www.geniusny.com) or contact Jon Parry, director of GENIUS NY, at [jparry@thetechgarden.com](mailto:jparry@thetechgarden.com).

#### ***About GENIUS NY***

GENIUS NY is an in-residence business accelerator program at CenterState CEO's The Tech Garden in Central New York that goes beyond substantial direct investment. In addition to three grand prizes of up to \$1 million, \$600,000 and \$400,000, the program also offers company stipends, housing, resources, programming, and connections, making it among the largest competitions of its kind across the globe.

#### **About CenterState CEO**

CenterState CEO is an independent and forward thinking economic development strategist, business leadership organization and chamber of commerce; dedicated to the success of its members and the prosperity of the region. We serve as an advocate and resource for smart business, catalyze and facilitate regional growth, and promote community prosperity through results-driven partnerships, planning and problem-solving. [www.centerstateceo.com](http://www.centerstateceo.com)

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