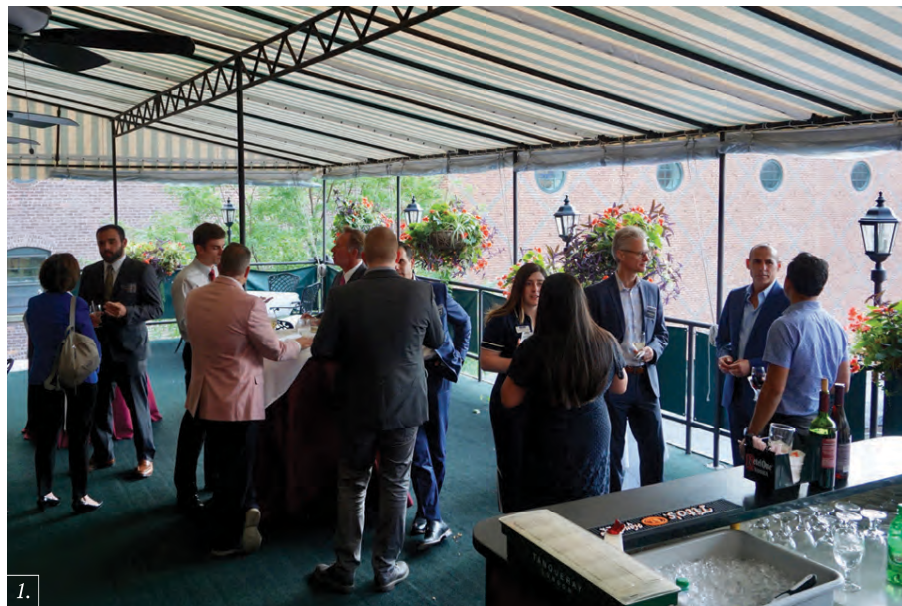


PUBLISHER'S DINNER RECAP

Connecting young entrepreneurs with top-level CEOs



DONNA ABBOTT-VLAHOS

1: The Publisher's Dinner provided an informal setting for CEOs and future leaders from rising startups to share candidly about their professional experiences. 2: Richard Honen, partner, venture capital & technology team leader and Albany office leader at Phillips Lytle LLP welcomes the group; 3. Founders of Capital Region startups connected with a group of the area's most notable business executives.

Since founding her startup – EmpowerU Virtual Reality – in 2018, Yumi Kageyama has focused on the bigger picture. Whether it's anticipating the next hurdle or hitting the next target, Kageyama is grooming her company for the future.

This fall, Yumi had the opportunity to have dinner with some of the Capital Region's most accomplished CEOs, who gave the ambitious entrepreneur advice that shook her overachieving philosophy to the core: slow down.

Not what she determined, nationally ranked 24-year-old taekwondo champion with two start-up enterprises under her belt expected to hear.

"Here we are, hustling in the trenches, focusing on the quarter, trying to make that next goal and cover that next paycheck. And they're asking me, what are you doing this week to make that happen? It was an eye opener," Kageyama said.

In September, Kageyama, along with the founders of Capital Region startups Catapult Games and DeadEye Sports, were invited to a dinner with five of the area's most notable business executives.

The event was conceived and sponsored by Phillips Lytle LLP and served as the Albany Business Review's first publisher's dinner. Held at the Fort Orange Club in Albany, it provided an opportunity for

established and future leaders to have candid, informal conversations about their professional experiences.

The goal of the evening was to connect the young area entrepreneurs with highly experienced, successful, top-level CEOs who shared stories about how they moved their ideas forward—or, sadly, made the difficult decision to shut them down.

"We wanted to bring together two local economies that rarely interact and provide a forum for each side to access the resources of the other. I'm in a lucky and unique position to have contacts in both of those communities, and it became striking to me how little they knew one another," said Richard Honen, partner, venture capital and technology team leader, and Albany office leader at Phillips Lytle LLP. Honen hosted the evening with Jeffrey Schwartz, also a partner at Phillips Lytle who, like Honen, focuses his practice on venture capital and corporate law.

During Kageyama's conversation with Dr. Ron Sampson, senior vice president and general manager of U.S. fab operations at GlobalFoundries, she learned that the Malta-based semiconductor manufacturer was creating a virtual reality training program for its employees. Kageyama's company uses virtual reality headsets to help referees, umpires and other sports officials

make calls in real-life situations, and to recognize and respond more quickly to injuries. In July, EmpowerU ran alpha testing at the USA Taekwondo National Championships in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

"It was really cool to hear that something similar is happening at such a large company. It really validates what we're doing," Kageyama said.

Sampson also came away with some news after talking with Kageyama. He learned that she operated a second business – a taekwondo studio located near GlobalFoundries – and planned to pass along the information as a possible resource for his team and their families.

"One personal benefit was having increased exposure to the work of entrepreneurs in the community and how some directly interact with my team," Sampson said.

The business leaders attending the dinner reads like an all-star list of Capital Region CEOs – Denise Gonick, former CEO of MVP Health Care; Walt Borisenok, co-founder and former president of Fortitech; David MacPhee, CEO of LeverPoint Management of Clifton Park that was acquired in August by Ultimus Fund Solutions; and Guha Bala, co-founder of Vicarious Visions and president at Velan Ventures Inc., an investment company focused on gaming and gaming technology.

"These people in what we call

the 'quiet, profitable economy' have handled big deals. They keep the lights on for everyone but often operate very quietly. We wanted these very early-stage companies to take advantage of what they bring to the table," Honen said.

The CEOs were very generous with their time, balancing packed schedules to make time for this initiative. MacPhee, for example, was in the midst of the sale of his company during the week of the dinner. "Dave and I were on conference calls until one in the morning all last week to close his deal, and here he is spending an evening giving his time and expertise," Honen noted. Honen said the experienced leaders benefited as well, gaining exposure to the community they're hiring from, or using to upgrade their systems or convert their businesses to mobile applications.

Dane Jennings, co-founder of Catapult Games, a VR gaming company that released its first game, "Don't Look Down" in April, had the chance to discuss his company with, and field questions from, Bala and Sampson, among others. Dan Lannan and Matt Madden, co-founders of Deadeye LLC, a real-time athletic training platform, had numerous questions from and interaction with the CEOs as well, especially those whose sons or daughters are D1 college student-athletes.