ARIZONA TECHNOLOGY | INNOVATION | CAPITAL | COMMUNITY

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ISSUE NO. 15

# SILICON OASIS

ARIZONA'S TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE




COVER STORY · PAGE 6

## DAPTA $6M SEED ROUND

### PRACTICAL AI FOR SMALL BUSINESS

Scottsdale's Dapta is scaling AI sales agents that answer, qualify and book customers.

*On the cover: Randy Marsden of HouseQuest at Silicon Oasis Pitch Night, Kiln Phoenix*

### PITCH NIGHT: ECOMMERCE

Five startups take the stage at Kiln Phoenix.

### $3.3B IMPACT

Tech Launch Arizona turns research into companies.

### UA RANKS TOP 3

Stanford analysis: third nationally for producing unicorns.

### AEROSPACE TALENT

Mesa opens a new aerospace & defense accelerator.

ALSO INSIDE — Luna Lu joins ASU · Arizona–Taiwan startup pact · Glendale's $7.5M STEAMworks

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# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EDITOR



**Editor-in-Chief, Silicon Oasis**

As we publish our October 2026 issue, Arizona's technology ecosystem keeps proving that its momentum is more than a single season.

Scottsdale's Dapta reportedly raised $6 million to put practical AI to work for small businesses. The University of Arizona's Wildcat Philanthropic Seed Fund made its first three investments, and Tech Launch Arizona showed what research commercialization is worth: an estimated $3.3 billion in economic output over nine years.

But the deals are only part of the story.

October was also about the pipeline behind them: a new aerospace and defense workforce accelerator in Mesa, Glendale Community College's STEAMworks center, a new innovation leader at ASU, and national recognition for University of Arizona founders.

We also brought the community together. Our Pitch Nights put ten Arizona startups in front of investors, in Tempe with Lioncrest VC and at Kiln Phoenix for our eCommerce edition.

At Silicon Oasis, our job is to connect those pieces: founders, capital, talent, universities, and the companies that can become their customers and acquirers. That is why we joined the Arizona Fund Managers Association as an ecosystem partner, and why we will be at COSM in Scottsdale this month.

This issue captures a month of steady building, and a glimpse of how Arizona becomes a Top 5 technology ecosystem by 2035.

Thank you for being part of it.



**Kyle Macdonald**
**Co-Founder & COO, Silicon Oasis**




## Our North Star:

**Establishing Arizona as a Top 5 U.S. technology ecosystem by 2035.**

Silicon Oasis exists to unite, promote, and strengthen Arizona's technology startup ecosystem. Our vision is to create an environment where founders can build, scale, and exit world-changing companies—and to become the trusted, influential, founder-support organization and unifying voice for Arizona technology.

We focus our work around five priorities:

- Connect the Ecosystem by building stronger relationships between founders, investors, operators, universities, corporations, talent, government, and community organizations.
- Grow Capital by expanding access to angel, venture, family office, and national investment capital.
- Promote Arizona by building Arizona's technology brand and telling our founders' and companies' stories nationally.
- Improve State Policy by developing a credible, founder-focused voice for Arizona's innovation economy.
- Capture Talent by retaining Arizona's best people while attracting high-impact talent from leading technology hubs.

Everything we do is grounded in five values: Founder Faith, Founders Build Founders, Purpose Over Activity, A Rising Tide Lifts All Ships, and Mission Above Recognition. We believe Arizona wins when its ecosystem works together—and when meaningful outcomes matter more than activity or individual credit.

# DAPTA RAISES $6M TO PUT AI TO WORK

*By Kyle Macdonald, COO of Silicon Oasis*

Scottsdale-based artificial intelligence startup Dapta has raised $6 million in seed funding to accelerate adoption of its AI-powered sales agents.

According to an October 14, 2026, report from the Phoenix Business Journal, the funding round was led by Chingona Ventures, with participation from Crew Capital, Broom Ventures, Cometa VC, 500 Global, and Fen Ventures.

The investment highlights increasing demand for practical AI applications designed to help businesses improve efficiency, engage customers, and scale operations without significantly expanding their workforces.

Founded by Nicolás Rojas, CEO of Dapta, the company develops AI-powered sales agents that help small and medium-sized businesses automate everyday customer interactions.




Its AI agent, Dapti, is designed to respond to inquiries, qualify leads, schedule appointments, and manage sales follow-up workflows.

For small businesses, these capabilities address a significant operational challenge. Owners and their teams often lack the time and resources to respond immediately to every prospective customer, potentially resulting in missed opportunities and lost revenue.

Dapta aims to bridge that gap by providing accessible automation tools that help businesses remain responsive while allowing employees to focus on higher-value activities.

Dapta has reportedly attracted more than 200,000 users, with approximately 4,000 additional users joining weekly.

The company's approach reflects a broader shift in artificial intelligence toward specialized applications that deliver measurable business value.

The company previously raised $1.4 million in pre-seed funding in 2024 and projects annual revenue exceeding $4 million in 2026.

With its latest financing, Dapta plans to accelerate expansion across the United States and Latin America, enhance its AI technology, and grow its Arizona-based team.

Rather than competing directly with companies developing foundational AI models, Dapta focuses on applying existing AI capabilities to specific business challenges, including customer acquisition, communication, and sales conversion.

Dapta's financing represents another example of venture capital flowing into Arizona-based technology companies. As artificial intelligence continues to transform industries, Arizona entrepreneurs are finding opportunities to build products that address real-world business needs.

***"Dapta's $6 million financing is another encouraging signal that Arizona founders are building solutions with the potential to compete in national and global markets."***

For founders, Dapta's growth illustrates the importance of identifying meaningful customer problems, developing practical solutions, and demonstrating market demand.

It also reinforces the value of connecting emerging technology companies with experienced operators, prospective customers, and growth capital.

Silicon Oasis is working to establish Arizona as a Top 5 technology ecosystem in the United States by connecting founders, investors, operators, policymakers, and community leaders.

As demand for practical AI applications continues to grow, strengthening those connections will be essential to supporting the next generation of Arizona technology companies.

# UA'S WILDCAT SEED FUND MAKES ITS FIRST THREE INVESTMENTS

***By Kyle Macdonald, COO of Silicon Oasis***

The University of Arizona is strengthening Arizona's startup ecosystem through its Wildcat Philanthropic Seed Fund, an evergreen investment initiative helping university-developed technologies reach commercial markets.

Managed by Tech Launch Arizona (TLA), the fund has made its first investments in three startups focused on energy storage, healthcare technology, and precision medicine.

CarbeniumTec is developing sustainable, metal-free batteries designed for long-duration energy storage, offering potential alternatives to conventional lithium-ion technology.

LifeSpan Digital Health is building emPower+, a digital platform designed to address physician and nurse burnout through research-backed wellness solutions.

UGenome AI is commercializing genomic technology that helps healthcare providers personalize treatments using patients' genetic information.

Launched in 2023, the fund has raised nearly 60% of its initial fundraising goal, targeting more than $5 million in philanthropic capital.

Unlike traditional venture capital funds, its evergreen structure reinvests proceeds from successful investments into future university startups, creating a sustainable model for supporting early-stage innovation. The initiative also provides University of Arizona students with hands-on experience in investment evaluation and due diligence.

Silicon Oasis is committed to strengthening these connections across Arizona, helping university-born startups access the capital, talent, and networks needed to scale. The Wildcat Philanthropic Seed Fund represents another important step toward establishing Arizona as a Top 5 technology ecosystem in the United States.



# SILICON OASIS JOINS THE ARIZONA FUND MANAGERS ASSOCIATION

PHOENIX, AZ — Silicon Oasis is pleased to announce its new role as an ecosystem partner of the Arizona Fund Managers Association (AFMA), strengthening connections between Arizona's growing technology and investment communities.

AFMA brings together investment managers, capital allocators, and financial industry professionals committed to expanding Arizona's investment management ecosystem.

As Silicon Oasis works toward its mission of making Arizona a top-five U.S. technology hub by 2035, connecting innovative startups with capital remains a critical priority.




This relationship represents an opportunity to strengthen collaboration between Arizona's founders, venture investors, fund managers, and institutional capital networks.

"Arizona has incredible entrepreneurial talent, and connecting that talent with the right capital is essential to building a world-class technology ecosystem," said Kyle Macdonald, COO of Silicon Oasis. "We're excited to work alongside AFMA to help strengthen those connections."

Through ecosystem partnerships like this, Silicon Oasis continues its work to unite Arizona's technology community, attract investment, and create more opportunities for high-growth companies to succeed.

Learn more: siliconoasisaz.org and azfundma.org

# SILICON OASIS SPONSORS COSM 2026 TECH SUMMIT IN SCOTTSDALE

Silicon Oasis is proud to sponsor a networking break at COSM 2026 Technology Summit, taking place November 18–20 at the Westin Kierland Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona.

COSM brings together influential technology executives, entrepreneurs, investors, researchers, and policymakers to explore innovations shaping the future of technology and economic growth.

This year's distinguished lineup includes Pat Gelsinger, former CEO of Intel; Joshua Achiam, Chief Futurist at OpenAI; Steve Forbes, Editor-in-Chief of Forbes; and Bob Metcalfe, inventor of Ethernet.

Silicon Oasis is especially proud to have two members of its Board of Directors participating in this year's summit. Sandra Watson, President and CEO of the Arizona Commerce Authority, will be among the featured speakers, while Jonathan Keyser, founder of Keyser Commercial Real Estate, will moderate The Silicon Miracle: Arizona as the Epicenter of Chip Innovation.




Their participation reflects the caliber of leadership helping advance Arizona's technology ecosystem and its growing influence nationally.

As a networking break sponsor, Silicon Oasis will support meaningful connections among conference attendees, further connecting Arizona's founders, investors, and technology leaders with national innovators.

Join us at COSM 2026! Learn more and register at cosm.tech.

# OASIS PITCH NIGHT HIGHLIGHTS 5 INNOVATIVE ECOMMERCE STARTUPS

*By Kyle Macdonald, COO of Silicon Oasis*

Arizona's technology community came together on October 21 for Silicon Oasis Pitch Night: eCommerce Edition, bringing founders, investors, operators, and technology leaders to Kiln Phoenix for an evening of innovation, entrepreneurship, and connection.

The event featured five startups developing solutions across eCommerce, merchandise, real estate technology, artificial intelligence, and financial services. Each company had five minutes to pitch its business, demonstrate its technology, and introduce its vision to Arizona's growing startup ecosystem.

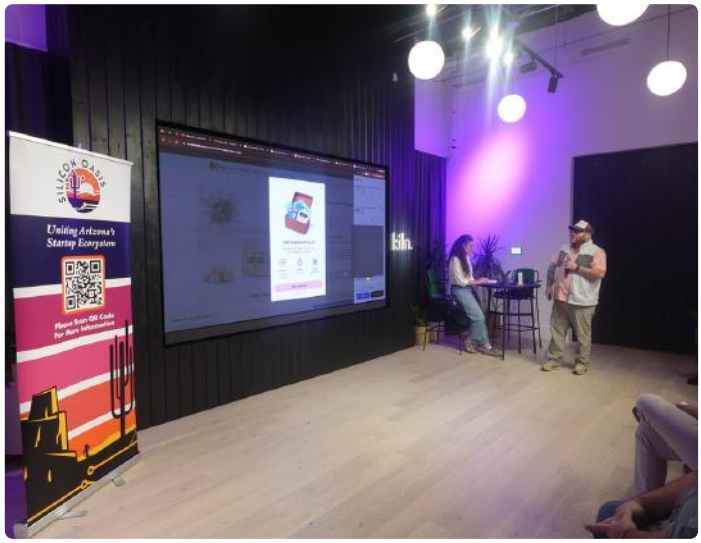
1. Lovya — Yuval Hamburg
Lovya is building what it calls the emotional layer of eCommerce, helping online retailers turn ordinary purchases into meaningful gifting experiences. Its technology integrates with Shopify to generate personalized greeting cards that are printed on demand and included with customer orders.



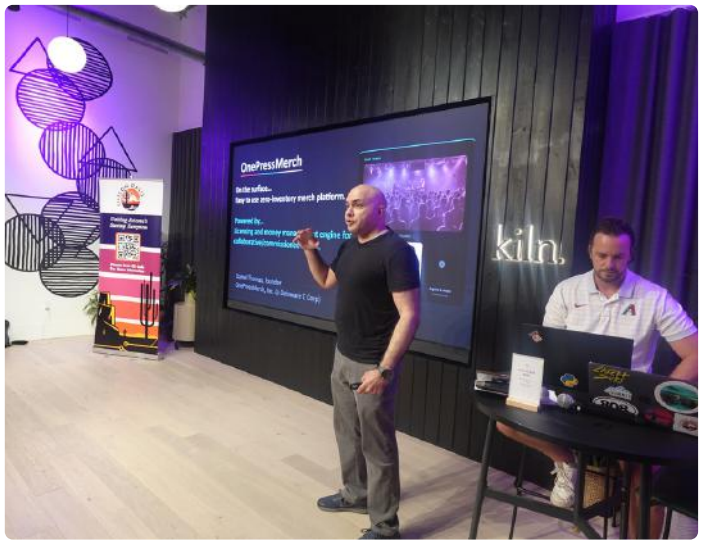

With initial brand installations already underway, Lovya is working to bring personalization directly into the eCommerce fulfillment process.

2. OnePressMerch — Daniel Thomas
OnePressMerch is developing a zero-inventory merchandise platform for musicians, comedians, performers, and creative professionals. The platform allows performers to sell merchandise through links or QR codes without purchasing inventory in advance.

Behind the scenes, OnePressMerch's technology manages licensing agreements, production, shipping, and revenue sharing between performers and the artists or photographers who contribute designs. Founder Daniel Thomas is combining his background in technology, live entertainment, and photography to create a more accessible and transparent merchandise marketplace.




3. HouseQuest — Randy Marsden
HouseQuest is building a spatial intelligence platform designed to change how consumers discover and evaluate real estate. Its augmented reality technology allows users to point their phones at nearby properties and access information about homes for sale, rent, or their estimated value.




The company is also developing an AI-powered matching system that uses psychometric profiles to connect homebuyers with properties based on lifestyle, personality, and personal preferences rather than traditional search filters alone.

Led by serial entrepreneur Randy Marsden, HouseQuest aims to make the home search experience more intuitive and personalized.



4. nLiten AI (TutHut) — Michael Sawka and Scott Hill
nLiten AI is developing personalized education technology through its TutHut platform, an AI-powered tutoring and study assistant designed to help students improve comprehension and academic performance. The company reports more than 300 student signups during its first two weeks on the Apple App Store and Google Play.

5. Happy Taxx — Melissa Diaz
Happy Taxx is developing a tax preparation business focused on creating a more approachable and engaging customer experience. Led by founder and CEO Melissa Diaz, CPA, the company seeks to differentiate itself through its branding, customer experience, and service model.

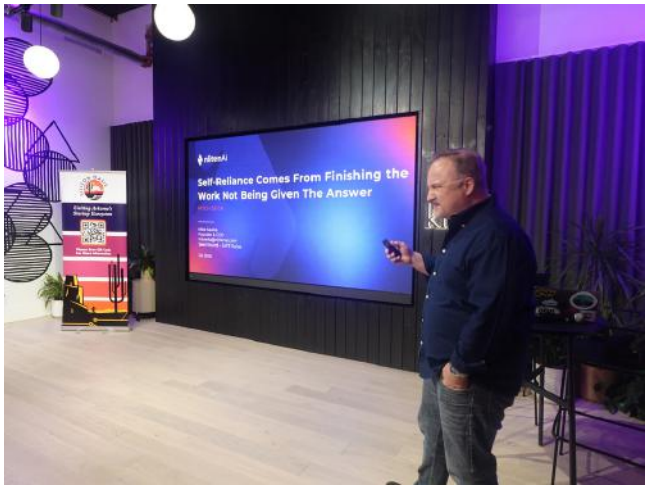
Silicon Oasis Pitch Nights are designed to create meaningful connections between entrepreneurs, investors, experienced operators, and the broader Arizona technology community.

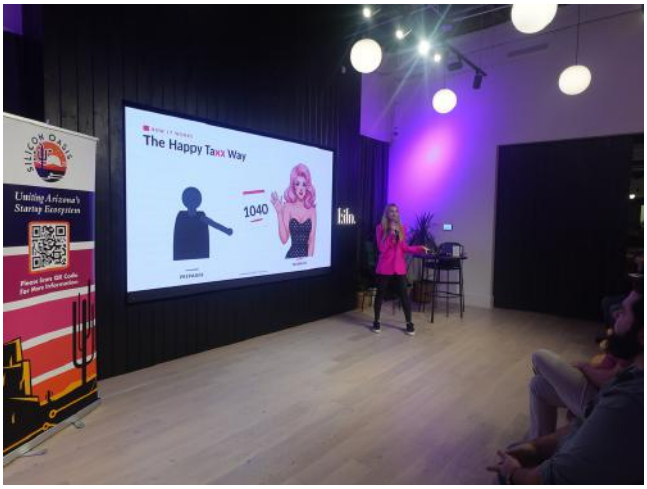
From personalized retail experiences to AI-powered education and real estate discovery, Arizona entrepreneurs are tackling meaningful problems and developing businesses with ambitions beyond the state.

A special thank you to Lovya and RGROUP Professional Services for supporting the event, to Kiln Phoenix for hosting, and to our five presenting founders.

Our monthly Pitch Night series provides a consistent platform for emerging startups to gain visibility and build relationships across the ecosystem.

Arizona's next generation of technology companies is being built today, and Silicon Oasis is bringing the people behind them together.



# OASIS PITCH NIGHT GATHERS FOUNDERS & INVESTORS IN TEMPE

*By Kyle Macdonald, COO of Silicon Oasis*

Silicon Oasis recently partnered with Lioncrest VC to host another Pitch Night in Tempe, bringing together founders, investors, operators, and technology leaders from across Arizona.

The evening was designed around a simple goal: put promising Arizona companies in front of the people who can help them grow. Rather than functioning as a traditional demo day, Silicon Oasis Pitch Night creates a curated environment where founders can present their companies, receive feedback, and develop meaningful relationships with investors and experienced operators.

Five companies took the stage:
• Olli Insurance, presented by Carrie Hartman
• LATCH by CoDynamics Lab Corporation, presented by Mike Holford
• KorGrid, presented by Hazen Kor
• Frosch Advanced Technologies, presented by Matthew Frosch
• Elanah.AI, presented by Austin Wood

The presenting companies reflected the depth and variety of innovation emerging across Arizona. Each founder had the opportunity to share the problem their company is solving, explain their business model, and engage directly with members of the investment and technology communities.

The conversations before and after the pitches are an equally important part of the experience, giving founders access to potential investors, customers, mentors, partners, and other ecosystem leaders.

The event was made possible through the support of its sponsors: Oasis Sponsor The Strongin Group, Cactus Sponsor Alio IT Solutions, and Mirage Sponsor Olli Insurance. Silicon Oasis also thanks Lioncrest VC for partnering on the event and helping assemble a high-quality room of founders, investors, and community leaders.

More Silicon Oasis Pitch Nights are coming soon.

# ARIZONA BIOSCIENCE WEEK SPOTLIGHTS THE STATE'S LIFE SCIENCES

*By Kyle Macdonald, COO of Silicon Oasis*

Arizona's technology economy extends well beyond semiconductors, software and aerospace. In October, Arizona Bioscience Week put the state's growing life-science ecosystem in the spotlight.

The AZBio Awards bring together researchers, entrepreneurs, healthcare leaders, investors and companies working across biotechnology, medical devices, diagnostics and healthcare innovation.

The 2026 honorees reflect the breadth of that ecosystem, with recognition connected to organizations including TD2 Oncology, HonorHealth Research Institute, the University of Arizona, Bright Path Laboratories, Picard Medical/SynCardia Systems, and Precision Epigenomics.

Arizona has spent years building significant research and healthcare infrastructure. The next opportunity is translating more of that expertise into scalable companies.

That requires strong connections between universities, healthcare systems, founders, experienced operators and investors. It also requires capital.

Life-science companies frequently face longer commercialization timelines and greater capital requirements than traditional software startups. Building a strong ecosystem therefore requires investors and institutions that understand the path from research and clinical validation to commercial scale.

Events such as Arizona Bioscience Week help create those connections. The larger opportunity is ensuring those relationships continue throughout the year.

For Silicon Oasis, life sciences remain an important part of building a globally competitive Arizona technology ecosystem.



# FLINN PROGRAM OFFERS $75,000 TO ARIZONA BIOSCIENCE STARTUPS

*By Kyle Macdonald, COO of Silicon Oasis*

Arizona bioscience founders have an opportunity to access funding support and specialized commercialization guidance.

Applications for the Flinn Foundation's 2027 Bioscience Entrepreneurship Program were open through October 30. The program is designed for early-stage Arizona companies developing medical devices, diagnostics, therapeutics, health technology and other bioscience innovations.

Six selected startups will each receive $75,000 in funding support administered through the Arizona Bioindustry Association. Participants will also receive access to advisors, structured programming and opportunities to develop relationships with prospective investors.

The program's value goes beyond the funding.




Bioscience founders often face long commercialization timelines and specialized challenges involving validation, regulation, intellectual property, manufacturing and capital formation. Experienced advisors and relevant investor connections can help teams navigate those challenges before they become expensive obstacles.

The program places emphasis on sustained investor engagement and concludes with an investment-readiness presentation to funding partners.

For Arizona, these programs help address a critical challenge: converting promising scientific research into companies that can survive and grow locally.

Silicon Oasis is focused on strengthening those connections across the state.

# UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA RANKS AMONG TOP PRODUCERS OF UNICORN FOUNDERS

*By Kyle Macdonald, COO of Silicon Oasis*

The University of Arizona is receiving national recognition for its ability to produce high-impact startups and entrepreneurs.

According to university reporting on a Stanford analysis, the institution ranked third nationally for the likelihood of producing a unicorn company and fifth for producing unicorn founders.

The analysis looks beyond the total number of startups associated with a university. Instead, it considers the likelihood of producing companies that reach valuations above $1 billion and the founders behind them.

That distinction matters. A thriving technology ecosystem is not defined only by how many companies are started. It is also defined by whether promising ideas become durable businesses capable of scaling, attracting investment and creating meaningful economic value.

The University of Arizona has spent years strengthening the infrastructure around research commercialization, including Tech Launch Arizona, startup incubation and support for faculty and student entrepreneurs.

Arizona already has examples of university-originated technologies producing major commercial outcomes. The opportunity now is to make that pathway more repeatable.

Founders also need access to experienced operators, early customers, venture investors, technical talent and mentors who understand the process of building a company.

For Silicon Oasis, the goal should not simply be to celebrate a ranking. It should be to help more university-born companies find the resources they need to grow in Arizona and compete globally.



# TECH LAUNCH ARIZONA: THE POWER OF TURNING RESEARCH INTO COMPANIES

*By Kyle Macdonald, COO of Silicon Oasis*

Arizona's universities are increasingly becoming more than research institutions. They are becoming startup engines.

A new examination of Tech Launch Arizona, the University of Arizona's commercialization office, highlights the scale of that opportunity.

According to economic-impact figures cited by the Arizona Daily Star, Tech Launch Arizona's work has helped generate an estimated $3.3 billion in economic output over the last nine years, along with $1.2 billion in labor income and $122.2 million in tax revenue.

The office works with University of Arizona faculty, researchers and students to protect intellectual property, license technologies and create companies capable of taking university inventions into the marketplace.




That process matters enormously for Arizona's technology ecosystem. World-class research alone does not automatically create a world-class startup economy. The connective infrastructure between laboratories, founders, experienced operators and capital is what turns discoveries into businesses.

The University of Arizona has particular research strengths in areas including optics, aerospace, defense, bioscience, engineering and cybersecurity. Each represents an opportunity to create technically differentiated companies that can remain rooted in Arizona while competing globally.

For Silicon Oasis, the lesson is straightforward: university commercialization should be treated as a core startup pipeline. Arizona does not have to import every future technology company. Many of them can be created from intellectual property already being developed here.

# ASU NAMES LUNA LU VICE PRESIDENT OF INNOVATION

*By Kyle Macdonald, COO of Silicon Oasis*

Arizona State University has named Luna Lu as its new vice president of innovation, bringing an experienced researcher, entrepreneur and industry partnership leader to one of the state's most important institutions for technology and economic development.

Lu will serve within ASU's Knowledge Enterprise and as managing director of the J. Orin Edson Entrepreneurship + Innovation Institute. Her responsibilities will span entrepreneurship, innovation, corporate engagement, economic development and strategic partnerships.

The appointment comes at an important time for Arizona. The state has rapidly expanded its position in semiconductors and advanced manufacturing while building growing capabilities across artificial intelligence, national security, robotics, sustainability, health care and other emerging technologies.

Universities will play a critical role in determining how effectively Arizona converts that momentum into new companies, technologies and high-quality jobs.



Lu brings significant experience doing exactly that.

Before joining ASU, she spent more than a decade at Purdue University, most recently serving as vice president in Purdue's Office of Industry Partnerships. According to ASU, industry-sponsored research awards at Purdue reached a record high in fiscal year 2026 under her leadership, increasing roughly 80% from the previous year.

She also brings firsthand entrepreneurial experience. Lu founded Wavelogix, a venture-backed deep-tech company developing smart infrastructure technology that is now used across more than 30 states and six countries.

That combination of research, commercialization and entrepreneurship could be particularly valuable for Arizona.

World-class research alone does not create a world-class technology ecosystem. The research must be connected to entrepreneurs capable of building companies, investors willing to fund them, corporations that can become customers and partners, and experienced operators who can help those companies scale.

ASU sits at the intersection of many of those groups.

Lu specifically identified the Phoenix region's emergence as a major technology hub and pointed to the opportunity for ASU to expand its economic impact while developing the talent needed to support the region's growth.

For Silicon Oasis, that mission closely aligns with the broader opportunity facing Arizona: creating stronger connections between universities, founders, investors, corporations and the broader community.

Arizona has many of the ingredients required to become one of America's leading technology ecosystems. Turning those ingredients into lasting economic impact will depend increasingly on our ability to commercialize research, create companies, develop talent and connect innovation happening inside our universities with the broader market.

ASU's continued investment in innovation infrastructure represents another important step in that direction.

# ARIZONA OPENS AEROSPACE & DEFENSE WORKFORCE ACCELERATOR IN MESA

***By Kyle Macdonald, COO of Silicon Oasis***

Arizona has opened a new workforce development facility designed specifically to support one of the state's most important technology industries.

Governor Katie Hobbs, Maricopa Community Colleges, Chandler-Gilbert Community College and the Arizona Commerce Authority officially celebrated the opening of Arizona's first Aerospace & Defense-focused Future48 Workforce Accelerator in Mesa.

Backed by a $6.4 million investment from the Arizona Commerce Authority, the renovated 14,058-square-foot facility includes dedicated classrooms, laboratories and hands-on training areas. The accelerator is expected to serve nearly 1,000 students annually.




That capacity matters because Arizona's aerospace and defense ecosystem continues to grow across the state. Major aerospace and defense companies already operate significant facilities in Greater Phoenix and Southern Arizona, while a growing number of startups are building technologies across autonomous systems, advanced manufacturing, space, defense software and national security.

Workforce development is also an important component of startup ecosystem development. Early-stage technology companies need access to engineers, technicians and specialized operators just as much as large employers do.

The next challenge is building the talent infrastructure necessary to support those industries while creating opportunities for the next generation of Arizona founders and technical workers.

# GLENDALE COMMUNITY COLLEGE OPENS $7.5M STEAMWORKS CENTER

***By Kyle Macdonald, COO of Silicon Oasis***

Arizona's innovation infrastructure continues to expand across the Valley.

Glendale Community College has officially opened its new $7.5 million STEAMworks Innovation Center, a 10,000-square-foot facility designed to give students hands-on experience with technologies increasingly important to Arizona's workforce and economy.

The new center includes virtual and augmented reality capabilities alongside a maker space equipped with 3D printers, drones, CNC routers, laser cutters, mills, lathes and welding stations.

The project grew from an initial $1 million concept into an approximately $7.5 million investment, funded primarily through grants, including a $5 million STEM grant.

The facility arrives as the West Valley continues attracting investment in advanced manufacturing, engineering, construction and technology.



GCC Dean of Career and Technical Education Dr. Susan Campbell told ABC15 that the types of companies entering the region are changing, increasing demand for skills in areas including engineering technology, advanced manufacturing, programming and construction management.

One of the most significant aspects of STEAMworks is its connection to industry.

According to ABC15, GCC incorporates input from more than 20 industry partners per program, with organizations including Boeing, Intel, Honeywell, NASA and the Arizona Department of Homeland Security.

These partners help the college understand the skills employers need today and where those needs are headed. GCC is also working with ASU, GCon Construction and McCarthy Construction around its construction management programming.

That connection between education and industry is increasingly important for Arizona.

Building a strong technology ecosystem isn't only about attracting companies or raising more venture capital. It also requires developing the engineers, technicians, founders and skilled workers capable of supporting those companies as they grow.

STEAMworks is also designed to extend beyond GCC's existing student population. The college plans to host K–12 robotics and engineering competitions, summer camps and community outreach programs, creating opportunities for younger students across the West Valley to gain exposure to engineering and technology.

Facilities like STEAMworks add another important piece to Arizona's growing innovation infrastructure.

Universities, community colleges, startups, investors, corporations and organizations across the state each play different roles in building the ecosystem. Creating stronger connections between those pieces can help turn education into talent, talent into innovation, and innovation into companies that are built and scaled in Arizona.

The opening of STEAMworks represents another investment in that pipeline—and another sign that Arizona's innovation economy is continuing to expand beyond traditional technology corridors.

# ENGINEERING WITH PURPOSE

## Chandler's Firewheel STEM Institute students retrofit ride-on Jeeps for children with mobility challenges.

*By Kyle Macdonald, COO of Silicon Oasis*

Students from Chandler-based Firewheel STEM Institute are showing what STEM education can look like when technical skills are applied to real human problems.

Firewheel students recently traveled to Pennsylvania as part of the organization's expanding Jeep Hack initiative, an effort that brings students, engineers and volunteers together to retrofit battery-powered toy vehicles for children with lower-extremity mobility challenges. The work was featured by FOX News, putting a national spotlight on an Arizona STEM program built around both engineering and service.

The concept turns an ordinary ride-on toy into an accessible mobility experience. Firewheel's program modifies electric Jeeps with custom controls that allow children with conditions such as cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy to operate the vehicles more independently.




For the students doing the work, the project is also hands-on engineering education. They must solve problems involving electronics, fabrication, controls and mechanical design while building something for an actual end user.

The program is beginning to extend beyond Arizona. Firewheel announced in September that it was working with Arizona State University and other partners to expand the annual Jeep Hack into three states.

Based in Chandler, Firewheel STEM Institute focuses on expanding access to experiential STEM education, with programs spanning robotics, advanced manufacturing, 3D printing, engineering design and autonomous systems.

Building a Silicon Oasis is not only about attracting companies or raising venture capital. It also means developing the next generation of engineers and giving young people opportunities to understand how technology can improve lives.

# ARIZONA AND TAIWAN EXPAND STARTUP COLLABORATION

**A new agreement with Taiwan's National Innovation & Entrepreneurship Association connects startups and investors across both markets.**

***By Kyle Macdonald, COO of Silicon Oasis***

Arizona's growing relationship with Taiwan is creating opportunities beyond semiconductor manufacturing.

During the recent opening of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Phoenix, the Arizona Commerce Authority and Taiwan's National Innovation & Entrepreneurship Association signed a memorandum of understanding focused on innovation, entrepreneurship and workforce development.

The agreement establishes a framework for connecting startups, small and midsize companies, investors, universities and industry organizations across both markets. Its priorities include investor matchmaking, commercial partnerships, international delegations, research collaboration, talent development and stronger supply-chain relationships.

Large manufacturing investments often bring global attention to a region, but lasting technology ecosystems also depend on the founders, suppliers, technical experts and investors who grow around those investments.

Taiwan has deep expertise in semiconductors, electronics, advanced manufacturing and technology commercialization. Arizona has rapidly expanding industrial capacity, research institutions and a growing community of founders and investors.

Successful international partnerships should produce tangible outcomes: founder introductions, investment relationships, pilot projects, research collaborations and companies establishing operations in Arizona.

Silicon Oasis is focused on building exactly these types of connections between founders, investors, operators and institutions.



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AZ Commerce Authority



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DLA Piper



Steve Brown
Trinity Capital



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# MEET OUR TEAM

*Get to know the builders, storytellers, and connectors powering the Silicon Oasis movement behind the scenes.*



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## Community Partners

PHX FWD

Founder-led software community uniting Arizona builders through events, peer groups, and startup-focused resources.

AZ PROPTECH COLLECTIVE

A community uniting real estate, construction, and tech innovators to shape Arizona's built environment.

MAC MISSION ACCELERATION CENTER SOUTHWEST

Accelerating defense and aerospace innovation through founder support, workforce development, and mission-aligned industry partnerships.

AZBIO™ ARIZONA BIOINDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

Arizona's bioscience association, helping life science companies grow and succeed statewide.

frontier forum. by Tesoro VC

Connects global deep-tech founders with investors in Phoenix, the day before SEMICON West.



## How To Reach Us


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