

Coronavirus crisis innovators

The six Tampa Bay startups that have helped out during the pandemic

[Lauren Coffey](#)

When a crisis strikes, a path emerges. There's the ones who run away from the danger, seeking shelter until it passes. There's those who stand strong, weathering the storm without making waves. And then, there's those who go toward the crisis to not only save themselves, but others.

The Tampa Bay startup community, it turns out, is filled with the latter.

Since March, when the Covid-19 pandemic essentially paused life as we knew it, shuttering businesses in the process, Tampa Bay entrepreneurs have stepped up to help out where they can. We've rounded up what's been done, whether it's producing PPE, helping financially or pivoting their services to better serve a post-Covid world.

And we have chosen three standout innovators to talk more in-depth on their pivots at an upcoming panel on Tuesday, August 25. Get the full details and register [here](#).

Kerriann Greenhalgh, KeriCure



Kerriann Greenhalgh has dedicated her life's work to making sure there is a natural and safe alternative to bandages, harsh chemicals and antibiotics to treat and protect wounds.

Nola Laleye

For Kerriann Greenhalgh, founder of biotech company KeriCure, her chance to help out came from an unusual source: a three-year old, stalled relationship with CVS to make a more natural moisturizing spray.

"It's kind of a funny story — our manufacturer called me in March and said, 'Kerriann, I'm getting hounded for hand sanitizer,'" Greenhalgh said. "(With the CVS deal) it was one of those things where we did all the leg work and it

didn't go anywhere. So, I dusted it off and did a hand sanitizer and fabric sanitizer spray."

That hand sanitizer has now sold more than 50,000 bottles and will become a permanent offering that otherwise would never have come to fruition.

"We didn't really think it would be that big of a deal — I didn't realize the shortage," Greenhalgh said. "It really took off when my sister, who lives in New Jersey, shared my Facebook post. They were under huge lockdown there and we had 200 orders in one day from her post. And it was, 'What did you do? Well, I guess this is a good idea.'"

She struck a private white-label deal with Molly Sud's in St. Petersburg and has created "coronavirus care packages" for SYKES Enterprises and Williams Sonoma employees, which include the sanitizer. They also have sold masks, which will not continue once the coronavirus pandemic dissipates but is currently helping those in the medical field, specifically medical spa and dentist's offices.

"We didn't want to dilute our company; we had so much going on," she said. "But it's a nice parallel and it's been really cool help companies reopen and get back to work safely."

Daniels Ikajevs, The Ring



The Ring team passes out masks in downtown St. Pete during the coronavirus pandemic. (Provided/Daniels Ikajevs)

Daniels Ikajevs was prepared when the coronavirus pandemic settled in to the United States. Ikajevs has a cousin in Italy and by February, had ordered masks, toilet paper and hand sanitizer for his eco-friendly coworking space, The Ring.

His preparation paid off — and then, he decided to give back.

"I see established companies have reserved funds to help with shocks — startups are always cash-strapped," Ikajevs said. "They don't have additional funds. In many cases, it's paycheck-to-paycheck but I want to give them the

tools and funds to weather this out."

Ikajevs donated \$25,000 to St. Petersburg's Fighting Chance Fund on May 7, a fund created to help businesses and individuals during coronavirus. The emergency grant fund provides \$5,000 to eligible businesses and \$500 to impacted individuals. Mayor Rick Kriseman stated with the fund's recent widening to include businesses that have been in operation less than a year, the funds will help significantly.

A week later, he decided to donate masks to businesses in Tampa, St. Petersburg and Clearwater.

"I ... wanted to contribute to the preservation and growth of the startup community, to ensure they have a real fighting chance to prevail," Ikajevs said in a statement. "The best action is to be unified and to support each other during this difficult time and I hope this inspires others."

[Get the full story here.](#)

Shuchi Vyas, Guestbox



Shuchi Vyas, founder and CEO of Guestbox.

(Provided/Shuchi Vyas)

Shuchi Vyas has been hit with a one-two punch during this season. While she was in New York City to attend a conference, she was diagnosed with coronavirus. She then had to attempt to still run her business while fighting off the virus, in an industry that was hit hard: the hospitality industry.

"I was in disbelief, like obviously this is temporary," she said. "Because of coronavirus and my symptoms, I stopped reading the news and all I listened to was hospitality executives [speaking on conference calls and meetings]. I think everyone in the industry's go-to is to be positive, so I was able to ride

that wave by feeding off that energy. Then it was, 'Oh my God, this is doomsday.'"

She immediately began to offer coronavirus-related boxes, including hand sanitizer and masks. And now, Vyas is now looking at a variety of directions she could take her startup. There's vacation rentals, which may see a comeback quicker than its hotel counterparts. There are cruise ships, which experts have projected may also have a loyal customer base return whenever possible. But the most immediate increase she has seen is individuals simply buying her boxes online.

[Learn more here.](#)

SynsorMed



Theo Harvey is co-founder and CEO of SynsorMed.

SynsorMed, which is an online platform that allows patients to measure medical data from their own homes, is working with the Charles Barkley Foundation (founded by the basketball Hall of Fame player) to combat health disparities in the Black community, in particular during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Barkley is a partner with Alabama Future Funds, which has invested in SynsorMed. SynsorMed has offices in Tampa, Atlanta and is headquartered in Birmingham. It is a member of local innovation hub Embarc Collective and was also in the inaugural class of the Tampa Bay Wave's TechDiversity cohort.

SynsorMed and the Charles Barkley Foundation came together to create the Save Our Selves Council, made up of roughly 20 Black technologists, health care professionals and policy makers concerned about the health of Black Americans.

“Our goal is to create the largest set of data with Black Americans during the pandemic,” SynsorMed Co-founder Theo Harvey said, acknowledging the data will outlast the pandemic. “Health care disparities for Black Americans have been around for hundreds of years. Our goal is to do something for the current crisis but it can go beyond that.”

[Read more about the partnership here.](#)

PBX Change



Woman using tablet with wifi symbol at home Internet of Things

Westend61 via Getty Images

PBX-Change often provides 5G networks to large events, such as the Tampa Bay AirFest, where the company was going to provide a two-gigabyte link from downtown Tampa to MacDill Air Force Base. But after AirFest 2020 was canceled, the company decided to use its networking gear for other purposes."

Our business slowed down quite a bit [due to the pandemic]," Bill Heinz, PBX-Change vice president, said. "Since we're not selling anything new right now, we wondered what we could do to help the community."

When the coronavirus lockdown forced schools across the country to transition to remote learning, many students were left struggling to adapt. Not only did they have to change environments and routines, but many students in low-income households lacked the internet connection necessary to get online. That's why Tampa Bay Fiber, a subsidiary of internet and telephone provider PBX-Change, stepped up and offered free WiFi to students, families and businesses in need.

"We were hearing about low-income families that couldn't afford internet connection," Heinz said. "Kids had laptops from school but no way to use them."

The company started by rolling out work-from-home applications to existing customers free of charge, Heinz said. Then it started offering these applications to non-customers.

Heinz and his colleagues set out to partner with organizations like United Way Suncoast and the Tampa Housing Authority to deliver internet connections to some of their low-income housing developments near downtown Tampa. The system works by sending out a signal from one of the multiple buildings that PBX-Change supplies with internet connection.

[Learn more here.](#)

Edgility



(Photo/Edgility)

(Photo/Edgility)

Balaji Ramadoss and his wife, Heather Holland, are spending their days working on their healthtech startup and their nights learning how to sew masks for medical professionals treating coronavirus patients.

The couple, who are both previous employees of Tampa General Hospital and recently were planning the birth of their child in a hospital, knew they had to do the most they could to help.

“This is personal, very personal for us,” Ramadoss said. “That all came into

focus and we decided it's not about selling (our services), it's not about being a tech company, it's focusing on what's important for us, which is, 'Let's help the people that take care of people, which is health systems.'"

Ramadoss and Holland are the co-founders of Edgility, which they founded in 2018 after leaving their jobs at TGH and moving to San Francisco. Edgility created a health care system which improves gaps and delays in information flow. In response to coronavirus, the company also [released three toolkits](#) specifically to act as a command center and help address coronavirus related challenges.

The toolkits will not only be available for their current customers, but released for other health care systems to use for free.

[Get the full story.](#)