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Seattle Toy Company Awarded \$20,000 in Microsoft Small Business Contest

SEATTLE, Washington - May 2, 2016 - Fort Boards, a Seattle company that produces children's construction toys, has won the \$20,000 grand prize award in Microsoft's Small Business Contest.

"I heard about the Microsoft Small Business Contest only a few days before the deadline to enter," said Fort Boards founder August Graube. "I figured it wouldn't hurt to enter but I didn't think we had any real shot at winning."

Graube submitted a short self-made video that included a stop-motion animated fort building session along with a voice-over that highlighted the lessons that he has learned as a small business owner. A few days later he heard back from Microsoft that Fort Boards was selected as a top 10 finalist.

"At that point I was very pleasantly surprised but still didn't think we could win, since we had just recently launched the business," Graube recalls. "It was a Facebook based voting contest and we had 300 Facebook fans. One of the other small businesses in the contest had over 40,000 fans. By the time I first logged on we were in last place by hundreds of votes."

The Fort Boards founder had underestimated the level of support that he and his product had. Links to vote for Fort Boards started to get shared by children's museums, teachers, other businesses and several blogs. "Pretty much anyone who has seen a child light up when playing with Fort Boards was voting for us and spreading the word," Graube said, "And I really pestered my friends and family constantly too."

The surprise support for Fort Boards quickly pushed the educational toy company into the lead. It became a very close race when the Mayor of Kansas City tweeted out support for one of the other businesses in the competition, a vintage furnishing store from Missouri, but by the next day Fort Boards supporters helped stretch the lead.

With the grand prize winnings of \$20,000 the Seattle toy company, that launched in September of 2015, plans to introduce new product lines that have been in development. The money can also help subsidize one of their more costly efforts: community outreach.

"We love being a part of the educational community. Fort Boards has been so well received by schools and children's museums. We have personally gone to several children's museums and created custom

Fort Boards exhibits for them. This is sometimes pretty costly but it's important to us" said Graube, who had come up with the idea for Fort Boards while working on a museum exhibit installation.

Graube will also be using the prize money to grow the team: "I brought on my first two employees earlier this year and it looks like we'll have to add a couple more to keep up with the demand. This competition really put us on the national toy map."

Along with the growth, the business is likely to encounter new challenges. But as Graube stated in the entry video for the Microsoft Small Business Contest, he is no longer scared of those challenges and is thrilled to see what is in store for Fort Boards, especially now that he knows just how much support he has.

For follow up information or additional quotes please call or email Neal Mizushima at 425-457-6356 or nealm@fortboards.com

Microsoft's Initial Announcement: <https://blogs.business.microsoft.com/en-us/2016/05/03/announcing-the-2016-small-business-video-contest-winners/>

Fort Boards Webpage: www.FortBoards.com

Photo Access: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/p69ed2vds8uu4yn/AAAdn1F4TLqRYz9WEWHJhdiwa?dl=0>