**[Guest Editorial Template]**

**Hail Entrepreneur!**

By [Your Name, Your title and organization]

Florida Companies to Watch recognition program focuses on celebrating the successes of Florida’s entrepreneurs – local entrepreneurs encouraged to apply

On February 9, 2019, a new set of Florida’s growth companies will be recognized as part of the Florida Companies to Watch awards program. [Your organization’s name here] is a community partner of this program and encourages successful local second-stage companies to represent [your community/region name here] in this statewide initiative. The companies selected each year make an astounding impact on Florida's economy by collectively providing thousands of jobs and contributing millions of dollars in revenue. In short, they tell a compelling story about the state's diverse economic landscape. Locally, these companies employ our family and friends — and their efforts are worthy of our support and celebration.

To improve our economy, we must look within and ensure that our foundation is solid. At the heart of this renewed opportunity to help grow our existing businesses are our local economic development efforts in partnership with the Florida Economic Gardening Institute, the Edward Lowe Foundation and the entrepreneur it is named for. In 1945, Edward Lowe (1920-1995) created an industry when he developed clay-based cat box filler as a favor to a friend. Upon realizing the potential of his product, he faithfully pursued informing people of the need his new “Kitty Litter” could fill. One little idea turned into an industry.

In 1985, Lowe turned his attention to helping other entrepreneurs achieve their own goals by creating the Edward Lowe Foundation, which focuses on second-stage companies as the leading drivers of our economy.

Edward Lowe's belief in the entrepreneur went deep. In his words, "The real roots of economic growth in the United States came about through the ingenious efforts of the entrepreneurial-spirited individuals and their small, independent companies, rather than through the giant companies. We must give credit to the mountain of men of the past—from them came the grassroots of American greatness. My life has been a testimony to the credo of the entrepreneur. People like me who have lived the dream should share their knowledge with others, because if private sector business doesn't help—then the American entrepreneur won't survive."

Edward Lowe's passion for the success of the entrepreneur, coupled with true leadership within Florida and our communities holds promise for us to create prosperity and grow jobs for our citizens.

According to YourEconomy.org, nearly 6 percent of Florida-based companies are responsible for providing more than 30 percent of the jobs in Florida. “Companies with this capacity for growth represent Florida’s future,” said Dr. Tom O’Neal, executive director of GrowFL and associate vice president for the University of Central Florida’s Office of Research and Commercialization. “Their success demonstrates the economic potential of the entire state.”

Recognizing the need to showcase the strengths and accomplishments of these companies on a statewide level, [your organization’s name here] and GrowFL, in association with the Edward Lowe Foundation, will once again host the Florida Companies to Watch awards program. Part of a national program to celebrate second-stage businesses, Companies to Watch was launched in 2011 in Florida and over the past seven years has recognized 350 second-stage growth companies.

From 2013 through 2016, the 2017 Florida Companies to Watch honorees generated more than $700 million in revenue and added more than 1,300 employees, reflecting a 255 percent increase in revenue and 229 percent increase in employment for the four-year period. That translates into greater than 60 percent annual growth rate for revenue and a greater than 50 percent annual growth rate for employment. Growth in 2017 continued, with a 56 percent revenue increase and 36 percent growth in employment compared to 2016. If their projections hold, these companies will have generated $1.2 billion in revenue and added more than 2,000 jobs over the last five years — a 454 percent increase in revenue and 347 percent increase in jobs since 2013.

As Edward Lowe would say each time he walked into a room with an entrepreneur, "Hail, Entrepreneur." We celebrate you, second-stage entrepreneurs, and your contributions to our communities. What may seem impossible, we know can be overcome. We live in a place where one individual can make a difference. Entrepreneurs are those unique individuals that change the way we think about what is possible. They have a clear vision for how life can be better for all of us, even when times are tough.

To apply and be considered as a 2018 Florida Companies to Watch, visit <http://GrowFL.com/flctw18> or contact info@GrowFL.com.

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