



(Hold for Release on October 28, 2021)

Oct. 28, 2021

Luke Tanen Promoted to CEO and President of Chicago Innovation; Paul Kitti Named Vice President for Marketing and Events

Chicago—Luke Tanen, Executive Director of Chicago Innovation, has been promoted to the position of CEO and President, reflecting the steady growth in the size and scope of Chicago Innovation under his leadership.

Paul Kitti, who leads the team responsible for organizing and coordinating the rapidly expanding offering of Chicago Innovation (CI) events and activities has been promoted to Vice President for Marketing and Events.

The move was announced by Thomas Kuczarski, President of the Chicago-based consulting firm Kuczarski Innovation, and the Co-Founder, in 2002, of Chicago Innovation (CI). Kuczarski will continue as Senior Advisor. The promotions will be effective on October 28th.

“All who have worked with Luke and Paul know their dedication to helping grow the innovation community in the Chicago region,” said Kuczarski. The Chicago Innovation team has sparked a decade of growth that has been nothing short of breathtaking and shows no sign of slowing down.”

When Tanen joined Chicago Innovation in 2010, its only program was the annual Chicago Innovation Awards, which remain at the heart of CI’s three part mission to celebrate, educate, and connect innovators in the Chicago region. Its view of innovation is inclusive, captured by CI’s well-known slogan embracing “high tech, low tech, and no tech; public, private, and non-profit” organizations, and its core value that “innovation is for everyone.” The scope of Chicago Innovation has grown to embrace the full spectrum implied by these slogans.

The expansion also included the launch of four subsidiary programs which have greatly expanded CI’s community and diversity. They are:

- The Women’s Mentoring Co-Op, which has grown to become the region’s largest mentoring initiative focused entirely on women mentoring women to help advance their careers.
- The Chicago Student Invention Convention, which works with teachers and their students in Chicago elementary and middle schools on the skills and values of invention. More than 20,000 students have participated, each developing their own invention, with the

best going on to regional and national recognition.

- Ageless Innovators, which teams up older innovators with younger counterparts in a co-mentoring relationship.
- The Ladder, which begins operation in 2022, will be a mentoring program for Black and Latinx innovators in the Chicago region.

“When Chicago Innovation was established by Tom Kuczmariski alongside co-founder journalist Dan Miller, our innovation community was a fraction of what it is today,” said Hardik Bhatt, President of Chicago-based SDI Presence and 15-year Chicago Innovation Board member and Innovation Awards judge. “Today our innovation ecosystem is among the most vibrant in the world. Chicago Innovation is widely known and admired for the important part it has played in making that happen.

“This is an ideal time for Luke to step up as CEO,” said Bhatt. “He works closely with the current generation of business and civic leaders in Chicago. He is tireless in his efforts to engage the new and rapidly growing generation of innovators, as well as Chicago technology stalwarts that are actively injecting innovation throughout their organizations. He reflects the best of the efforts that are underway to see Chicago become home to the talent that is developed here.”

In the past 20 years, 335 companies have won the Chicago Innovation Awards. 98 percent of those companies are still in business. 60 of those winners have been acquired with exit values exceeding \$110 billion. Among this year’s nominees for its popular Up-and-Comer awards, 38 percent are organizations led by women.

Sponsor support for Chicago Innovation has grown in tandem with the expansion of the organization, with dozens of corporations now sponsoring the organization.

Tanen is a 2007 graduate of Northwestern University, earning his MBA from Northwestern’s Kellogg School of Management in 2016. During his time at Chicago Innovation, Tanen has been named a Crain’s “20 in their 20’s” and Crain’s “Top 25 Rising Stars in Tech.” He recently served as Chair of the Innovation and Technology Membership Committee of the Economic Club of Chicago. He and his wife Jamie, a teacher in the Chicago Public School system, live in Chicago and have twin boys, Avi and Jonah.

Kitti joined Chicago Innovation in 2013, following work as an event coordinator at Chicago-based Red Frog Events. Earlier he had been a journalist and promoter for Pakmode Media+Marketing in Ypsilanti, MI, with a special emphasis on community events. A resident of Chicago, he is a graduate of the University of Michigan.

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