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Note: Images available via [Dropbox](#).

Tel Aviv University and South Florida Local Governments Tackle Florida Stormwater Runoff in Inaugural LocalTAU Pitch Competition

Top scientific teams from Israel's leading university pitch novel solutions to local crisis in "Shark Tank" style competition; The "Hydro Biofilters" team landed top prize, awarded \$20,000 to pilot solution

Miami, FL — [Tel Aviv University](#) (TAU), the City of Miami, City of South Miami and City of North Bay Village came together last night to solve one of Florida's most critical issues: stormwater runoff. In the first-ever [LocalTAU](#) competition, TAU professors and students gathered at CIC Miami to pitch their innovative solutions to an audience of nearly 100 people, including South Florida government officials and stakeholders and local and national American Friends of TAU leaders, to help solve a crisis that affects millions of Florida residents. The "Hydro Biofilters" team won first place and \$20,000 to begin researching and piloting the practical implementation of their solution.

"For Dr. Yaron Zinger and me, LocalTAU's pitch competition and meeting with South Florida leaders and officials opened up a new area of the U.S. that urgently needs innovative solutions to water issues, which are intrinsically tied to climate change including sea-level rise, saltwater intrusion, and stormwater of course posing serious threats to the Sunshine State," said Prof. Dror Avisar. "Winning the competition is icing on the cake. Of course, we want to thank the leadership of LocalTAU and American Friends of TAU. We're looking forward to the next steps."

Two teams were selected from 15 applicants to participate, and included:

- **"Hydro Biofilters"**: Proposes building multi-layered biofilters to direct stormwater away from city streets, purify it and turn it into an easily accessible water resource. Presented by **Prof. Dror Avisar** and **Dr. Yaron Zinger**.
- **"The Drain Box"**: Proposes dividing stormwater runoff: domestic collection from roofs and balconies into home-adjacent containers; municipal collection diverts runoff to an underground infiltration box; and a much smaller portion into the bay. Presented by **Ines Zucker, PhD** and **Gil Nisim, MSc candidate**.

The LocalTAU competition used "Shark Tank" style rules. Both teams were given ten minutes to present their innovative solutions and then faced a round of questions from the judges panel. Judges included: **Dr. Frances Colón**, former highest-ranking Hispanic scientist in the Obama State Department; **Col. Alan M. Dodd**, director of the City of Miami Department of Resilience and Public Works; **Melissa Hew**, program manager in the City of Miami Office of Resilience and Sustainability; **Denise O'Brien**, Chair,

North Bay Village Sustainability and Resiliency Task Force; **Zac Cosner**, City of South Miami sustainability administrator; **Tamence Knowles**, director of environmental health and safety at FIU; and **Michael Rupinski**, environmental compliance officer at FIU.

The judges challenged both teams about the sustainability of their potential solutions due to Florida's frequent hurricanes, issues with coordination and sequencing, concerns about mosquitos and Zika virus and ultimately the cost of implementation.

After 15 minutes of private deliberation, the judges returned to offer their analysis of the proposals and announce the winner. They provided commentary on the pros and cons of each proposals. Ultimately, the judges preferred the Hydro Biofilters proposal citing its low cost and sustainability.

Amanpour & Company correspondent **Alicia Menendez** served at the moderator of the event. LocalTAU founders **Vinna Katz** and **Romina Ruiz-Goiriena** provided introductory remarks. Special guests **Mr. Guy Gilady**, Deputy Consul General of Israel in Miami, and **Clement Erbmman**, national chairman of American Friends of Tel Aviv University also spoke briefly.

The host committee included: **Romi Bhatia**, executive director of Idea Center at Miami Dade College; **Dave Doebler**, cofounder of Volunteercleanup.org; **Sarah Emmons**, managing director of Radical Partners; **Albert Gomez**, head of superNATURE; **TJ Marston**, principal at Plot Studio and instructor at FIU; **Dara Schoenwald**, cofounder and executive director of Volunteercleanup.org; **Rachel Streitfeld**, Esq., founder and managing partner of Bright Side Legal; **Caiti Waks**, Esq., cofounder and president of Debris Free Oceans; **Jeremy Waks**, cofounder of Debris Free Oceans.

About LocalTAU

[LocalTAU](#) is a young leadership program that offers engaged, passionate leaders the opportunity to identify local issues and source innovative solutions from world renowned TAU research through an annual pitch competition. In the process, it creates awareness, community and synergy between TAU and young activists in cities across the United States. LocalTAU uses a self-funded grant model to bridge philanthropy and startup methodologies – i.e. pitch competitions, pilots, agile adaptation.

The South Florida collaboration is the first LocalTAU Pitch Competition and is produced in coordination with American Friends of Tel Aviv University.

About American Friends of Tel Aviv University

[American Friends of Tel Aviv University](#) supports Israel's most influential, comprehensive and sought-after center of higher learning, [Tel Aviv University](#) (TAU). TAU is recognized around the world for creating an innovative, entrepreneurial culture that generates inventions, startups and economic development in Israel. TAU is ranked 8th in the world, and first in Israel, for producing startup founders of billion-dollar companies. Tel Aviv University researchers rank #1 in Israel in producing patents, are first in the world to print a 3D heart with human tissue, and rank #4 in innovation in the world.

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