



## STARTUPS & INNOVATIONS

By Kaitlin Aquino | [kaquino@ocbj.com](mailto:kaquino@ocbj.com)

### FUNDING

**Ryvid Inc.**, an early-stage electric motorcycle company, received a \$20 million grant from the state of California in support of job creation and advancing the state's climate goals.

The funding will allow Ryvid, currently based in Huntington Beach, to move its headquarters a few blocks over the Orange-Los Angeles county line, to Hawaii Gardens, where it plans a larger manufacturing base.

"The Ryvid team is very grateful to Gov. Gavin Newsom and the California Competes Program for this grant," founder and CEO Dong Tran told motorcycle publication **RideApart**. "The founders of Ryvid are immigrants and children of immigrants who came to California for a better life, and we are committed to providing high-paying manufacturing jobs to our home state for years to come in one of the fastest-growing sectors of electric mobility."

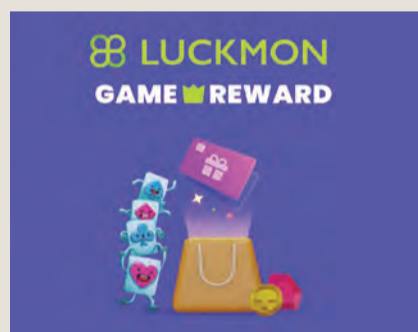
The California Competes Program aims to promote business development in the state. The program has over \$180 million in available tax credits to support businesses



Electric motorcycle company moving HQ to larger facility

that increase the number of full-time jobs and create state-wide impact.

Tran previously founded Huntington Beach design- and engineering-focused consulting firm **Whiterok Inc.** He worked as the lead designer for aviation and aerospace company **Icon Aircraft Inc.** and as an exterior designer at **Honda R&D Americas LLC.**



Mobile gaming company raises \$1.3M

**Luckmon Inc.**, an Irvine mobile game platform company, has raised \$1.3 million in pre-seed funding.

Investors include **Chang Kim**, CEO of digital storytelling platform **Tapas Media**; **Changsu Lee**, founder and CEO of AI-powered chatbot and voice assistant developer **Allganize**; and VC firm **Primer Sazze Venture Capital Partners**.

Luckmon will use the funding to further expand its casual gaming offerings, the company said.

Its reward-based gaming platform allows players to earn money by playing mobile games. Luckmon is currently developing free-to-play games that reward players with in-app currency gems, which can be exchanged for gift cards from **Visa**, **Paypal** and **Amazon**, among others.

The company's games aren't "about who the best player is, it's for anyone who loves to play games and make money," Luckmon CEO **David Son** said in a statement.

The company, founded last year, has raised \$2.5 million to date. Son previously worked as the head of global business development at mobile game developer **Vespa Inc.** He also formerly led game developer **Soulgit Games**.

**LaWow LLC**, a Laguna Niguel legal software company, has secured nearly \$1.8 million in a funding round led by **Dant Ventures LLC**.

The funding will allow the startup to further scale its infrastructure and team of developers, **laWow** founder and CEO **Kaylee Zhu** said.

LaWow, a search engine for legal cases, aims to bring transparency to the legal system by being a resource for journalists, researchers, stock investors and others who are curious about lawsuits, company officials said.

The company earlier this year completed an additional \$2.2 million financing round also led by Dant Ventures, which is owned by stock holding firm **Actuarial Management Corp.**

Zhu, who co-founded laWow this year, previously worked on the platform behind the scenes without any official title at the company. She eventually assumed the role of CEO in October to replace **Anderson Zou**, who



Legal software firm closes \$1.8M funding round

now heads the company's team of software developers.

"I realized that there are a lot of business-related activities going on every day [at laWow]," Zhu told the Business Journal in an email. "Anderson needs to spend a lot of time in developing and managing other web developers. Letting him be the CEO is not the most efficient way."

Prior to becoming laWow's CEO, Zhu worked as a portfolio manager at Actuarial Management. She graduated from the **University of California, Irvine** in 2020 with a degree in pure mathematics.

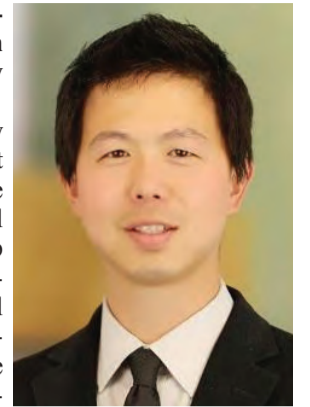
### EXEC BOARD & HIRES

Irvine VC firm **Sunstone Management** recently appointed **Zhen Wang** to founder community manager.

Wang will oversee the new Founder Development Program at the firm (which isn't related to the Irvine-based REIT Sunstone Hotel Investors), which mentors startup founders under Sunstone's Management's portfolio. Wang will also represent the firm when collaborating with public and private companies to develop startup accelerators and ecosystems, officials said.

"With his long history of working in finance and technology, as well as his deep breadth of knowledge grounded in his own experiences of being a founder in California, Zhen will be a vital source of support for the companies we work with," Sunstone CEO and Managing Partner **John Keisler** said in a statement. "The Founder Development Program will be a key driver of our mission to support innovative startups and diverse founders, and Zhen will be a highly valuable leader in his new role."

Wang is the co-founder and chief financial officer of **Extra Financial Inc.**, also known as **Cheese**, which offers banking and credit building services to underserved communities. He also founded **Technology Credit Inc.**, which provides automated services to help entrepreneurs claim R&D payroll and income tax credit. He previously worked at **EY** as the Southern California leader of the company's China Outbound Investment Network.



Zhen Wang  
Founder Community Manager  
Sunstone Management



Octane appoints seven new board members

Newport Beach-based **Octane**, Orange County's largest tech and medtech business accelerator, has appointed seven new members to its board of directors.

Notable hires include **Lions Gate Entertainment Corp.** (NYSE: LGF-A) Chief Operating Officer for Home Entertainment and Global Content Distribution Operations **Akin Ceylan** and **Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian** Chief Financial Officer and Senior VP **Andrew Guarni**.

"The Octane board of directors represents key leaders that have a global influence beyond just Orange County as it relates to innovation," Octane CEO **Bill Carpou** told the Business Journal in an email. "We have been very strategic to assure diverse representation from the industries we support, an individual's functional responsibility, and their influence within those industries."

Other hires include **Laurent Attias**, senior VP of corporation development strategy at eye-focused medical company **Alcon Inc.** (NYSE: ALC); **Mike Hedge**, managing partner of the Orange County branch of corporate law firm **K&L Gates LLP**; **Celine Martin**, company group chairman, cardiovascular and specialty solutions group at **Johnson & Johnson** (NYSE: JNJ); **Dominique Worthington**, general manager of advanced energy and case management at **Medtronic plc** (NYSE: MDT); and **Kamakshi Zeidler**, founder and managing partner of plastic surgery firm **Aesthetx**.

Octane's board now counts 46 members, according to its website.

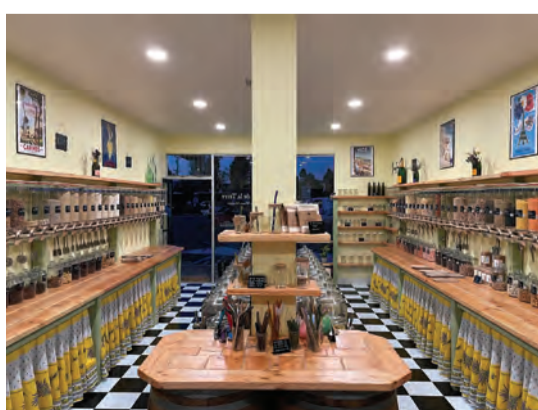
### LAUNCH

Two doctoral students at the **University of California, Irvine's** department of earth system science, **Jessica Walden** and **Chris McGuire**, have opened a zero-waste market in Costa Mesa.

The store, **Amis de la Terre Zero-Waste Market**—which translates from French to "Friends of the Earth"—offers organic pantry and health foods in bulk. Customers receive their goods in jars or paper bags, creating no additional plastic waste.

Amis de la Terre takes inspiration from McGuire and Walden's studies at UCI, where the newlywed couple worked together collecting ocean samples that are filled with microplastics.

"When every time I collect a shot glass worth of water and can find hundreds of these tiny pieces of plastic—no matter where you get the sample from—you realize the problem is much bigger than the public understands," McGuire told the **Los Angeles Times**.



UCI post-grads open zero-waste market in Costa Mesa

Microplastics travel through the food chain and end up in human food. A study published this year in the **Environment International** scientific journal found that 77% of people tested contained microplastics in their blood.

While their impact on the human body is not entirely understood, researchers found that microplastics can damage cells and adversely affect human health, according to a study published this year in the **Journal of Hazardous Materials**.

Amis de la Terre is located at 1125 Victoria St., near the Santa Ana River. Store hours are Wednesday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. and weekends from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Walden previously worked as a tidepool educator at environmental conservation nonprofit **Laguna Ocean Foundation** in Laguna Beach. She also interned at science museum **Seymour Marine Discovery Center** and zero-waste nonprofit **5 Gyres Institute**.