**Press Release**

W.A. de Vigier Awards 2020

**Four Out of Five Winners Are Cleantech Startups**

Solothurn, June 10, 2020. **From 192 submitted projects, the jury picked their five winners today and awarded each of them with a prize of CHF 100,000. Four out of five winners are Cleantech startups, a reflection of the high percentage of submissions by this sector this year. These companies have the potential to make the rebuilding process of the Swiss economy more environmentally friendly after Covid-19.**

"While we struggle with a global pandemic, it’s evident that a much bigger challenge lays ahead of us with the consequences of climate change. Our generation has urgent environmental problems to solve and this is reflected in the particularly high number of Cleantech startups running for and winning our awards this year. These Cleantech companies have the potential to rebuild our economy in a more environmentally friendly way after Covid-19", says Regula Buob, Managing Director of the W.A. de Vigier Foundation. “The drive and resilience these young leaders show are incredible. Nothing and nobody can stop them – even in challenging times like these”, continues Buob.

Due to Covid-19, the award ceremony will take place at the studios of CNN Money Switzerland instead of celebrating at the de Vigier Sommerhaus in Solothurn. Anyone is welcome to join the event online. “Our foundation supports young entrepreneurs who develop innovations with high value for our society. We are extremely proud to present this year's winners and Top 10 live to an even larger audience than usual“, says Daniel Borer, President of the W.A. de Vigier Foundation Board.

**The Winners (in alphabetical order)**

***Bloom Biorenewables AG from Marly (FR) –Sustainable Alternatives to Fossil-Based Molecules***

Petroleum is found in most everyday products which hurts our environment. Bloom found a way to turn wood and agricultural waste into renewable materials that fully replace petroleum. Thanks to this solution, companies have a green and locally available alternative, reach eco-conscious customers, meet government guidelines, save on C02 taxes and help tackle climate change.

„Because of Covid-19 the oil price has dropped, we are now competing with an even cheaper product. But we need to think beyond that and make a fundamental change by replacing petroleum with green alternatives“, says Remy Buser, CEO of Bloom Biorenewables AG in regards to how the pandemic has affected his company.

***EH Group Engineering AG from Prangins (VD) - Innovative Fuel Cell Technology for Clean Energy***

Hydrogen power would be a strong and clean power source but it’s been too expensive, too complex and too unreliable to be widely used in the market. At EH Group we developed a technology that harnesses the power of hydrogen in a compact, reliable way at low cost and minimal initial investment. Thanks to our solution, major manufacturers in the automotive, aviation and maritime industries get way ahead of their competitors in innovating towards a greener future – the only future we have.

„I cannot deny that this is a very difficult time. But we keep pushing forward, we certainly do not give up. We have daily phone calls with our team members and my team is the most valuable asset I have. My employees will help shape the company when it grows and I can feel their unwavering commitment“, says Mardit Matian, CEO of EH Group Engineering AG.

***FenX AG from Zurich (ZH) – Sustainable High-Performance Insulation for the Building Industry***

When choosing insulation materials, the building industry has to compromise on either price, flammability or ecological impact. At FenX we found a way to turn industrial waste into handy and high-performance insulation panels that are safe, non-flammable and have a minimal carbon footprint. With this solution our clients can have it all: they get excellent insulation, fulfill all the market requirements in terms of safety and green labels - all at a low cost.

„We’re in the very lucky position that the building industry kept going through the pandemic. We do have delays but nothing too dramatic. We also got invaluable support from investors who were ready to back us up with convertible loans. Our team reduced salaries to a minimum to help the company emerge stronger after this challenging time“, says Etienne Jeoffroy, CEO of FenX AG.

***Microcaps AG from Zurich (ZH) – Precise Microencapsulation on an Industrial Scale***

Making sure that drugs are released in the affected part of the body and at a specific rate is a huge challenge, because the size of the capsules that deliver these active ingredients is uncontrollable. At Microcaps we developed a patented technology that enables the size control of these microcapsules with Swiss precision, hence they all behave exactly the same. This means we can directly tailor and predict the release profile of a drug. Our solution is also highly relevant for fragrances, flavors and probiotics.

“We tried to anticipate early on, how Covid-19 could affect our business and now we try to make predictions for the time after the crisis. Of course we asked our board for help and reached out to our network to make sure we stay on top of the things that we can control”, explains Alessandro Ofner, CEO of Microcaps AG.

***Oxara AG from Zurich (ZH) - Transforming Excavation Materials Into Sustainable Building Products***

Every building project starts with digging out tons of dirt and there is not enough landfill space for this excavation waste. Plus, there is a shortage of concrete needed for building.

Oxara developed a chemical mixture that turns excavation waste into eco-friendly building material.This saves the building industry millions in landfill costs and provides it with enough sustainable material for construction.

„We can do less business now but we can invest more time into our technology. We informed our stakeholders that we are not able to deliver according to the original plan and we come together as a team to look for creative solutions, given the situation“, explains Gnanli Landrou, CEO of Oxara AG.

**About the W.A. de Vigier Awards**

The W.A. de Vigier Award is the most established prize for young entrepreneurs in Switzerland. With the annual prize money of CHF 500,000 (five equal prizes at CHF 100,000 each), these awards rank among the most highly endowed startup prizes in Switzerland. Over the past 31 years, the foundation has distributed over CHF 11 million in seed money across all sectors. The results are over 90 flourishing startups, successful IPOs, multiple company exits and above all, many newly created jobs.

The following aspects are relevant for the evaluation of the projects: The entrepreneurial personality, the high degree of innovation, the value for society as a whole, the technical and financial viability, market prospects and the potential for job creation.

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Three language versions of this press release and a selection of high resolution images will be available to download on our website, starting June 10 at 5:30pm

<https://devigier.ch/media/media-2020/>

**Contact details for questions**

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