

# Burlington Free Press

## LOCAL

# These Burlington college students made the most of the pandemic — by starting businesses



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The last two pandemic years have been a challenging time for college students in Burlington, with COVID-19 guidelines interrupting the typical rhythm of school life. Zoom replaced classrooms, extracurricular activities took a backseat, and face-to-face interactions were limited.

But some college students found inspiration to create their own companies over the past two-and-a-half years, despite the adverse conditions around them. Here are five student-led startups founded during the pandemic in Burlington.

## FUAY LLC

**Founder:** Ahmed Adan (Champlain College, class of 2024)

**Created:** 2021

**Industry:** Clothing

**Social media:** Instagram (@fuayllc)

**Description:** FUAY (For Us All Year) is a clothing brand that showcases local designs made by students and artists in Burlington. Founder Ahmed Adan, who attended Burlington High School and the Center for Technology, Essex, says he started the company to bring awareness to the variety of styles, cultures, and characters in the area. Adan created the company in January of 2021 and released the first collection — which can be found at [fuay.net](http://fuay.net) — a few months later, in May. His goal is to work with as many artists as possible and hopes to begin selling the shirts at an on-campus shop at Champlain College. Shirts begin at \$18.

**Take a look:** Inside the new location for Dobra Tea in downtown Burlington

## Mini Golf on the Go

**Founder:** Peter Miller (Champlain College, class of 2024)

**Created:** 2020

**Industry:** Entertainment

**Social media:** Instagram (@minigolfonthegovt), Facebook (Mini Golf On The Go)

**Description:** Peter Miller had the idea to create a portable mini golf course in late 2020, in the midst of the pandemic. While he lacked a background in carpentry and woodworking, Miller created a DIY mini golf hole in his parents' garage in Essex, and fell in love with the creative process. After building eight more holes, he landed his first rental in April of 2021, and since then, he's experienced rapid growth. Miller has now made 36 holes and purchased his own custom-decorated van that he uses to transport the course to birthday parties, corporate events, schools and summer camps. This year, Miller has recorded 70 rentals, making Mini Golf on the Go "a full-time job" for the rising junior at Champlain College. Miller rents out both nine and 18-hole courses, complete with clubs, balls, scorecards, and pencils. Prices begin at \$175 for the nine-hole course and \$300 for the 18-hole set-up. Down the line, Miller hopes to franchise Mini Golf on the Go and bring it to other states.

**On the course:** Champlain islands brewery adds locally-sourced food to the menu at Alburgh golf course

## Muz Gear

**Founder:** Murphy Roberts (University of Vermont, class of 2024)

**Created:** 2021

**Industry:** Clothing

**Social media:** Instagram (@muz\_gear)

**Description:** When UVM student Murphy Roberts made himself a winter hat late last year, he didn't think much of it. The rising junior, nicknamed "Muz" by his friends, was confident in his sewing abilities but didn't expect friends to approach him about his creation. But he began to receive questions and inquiries about his unique hat, known for its sleek design,

engaging patterns, and signature ribbon. As interest grew, Roberts decided to create his own business, knowing he had more free time to sew. Muz Gear, which sells handmade and custom-made hats, has four styles, priced at \$20 each. Roberts said he sold 10-15 hats a week throughout the winter, mostly to students at UVM, Champlain College, and St. Michael's College. Currently, Roberts is trying to get his hats into stores in Burlington.

**Top of the class:** Meet Vermont's dining superstars: Three restaurants nominated for James Beard Award

## **Newpast LLC**

**Founder:** Brigham Boice (Champlain College, class of 2025)

**Created:** 2020

**Industry:** Technology

**Social Media:** Instagram (@newpastgames), Facebook (Newpast, LLC)

**Description:** Newpast is a combination of founder Brigham Boice's three passions: history, art, and technology. The idea to create the business sprouted in 2021, when Boice built a 3-D recreation of his hometown of Peterborough, New Hampshire for locals to relive history. (Boice originally wanted to create a physical installment, but when the pandemic hit, he realized he had to make his creation digital.) Now, he's working on Newpast's next idea, Project Monadnock, a location-based history education app. Users will be able to interact with pins — which are posted by Newpast, other users, museums, galleries, and local businesses — that show pictures and other historical evidence of the area. Boice is currently working with local historical societies in Burlington and plans to release Project Monadnock later this year.

## **Shark Bite Hot Sauce**

**Founder:** Jaeda Dean (University of Vermont, class of 2023)

**Created:** 2022

**Industry:** Food

**Social media:** Instagram (@sharkbite.hotsauce)

**Description:** Following months of isolation during COVID, Jaeda Dean began to think harder about how she was spending her free time. She started to explore cooking as a hobby, and one day, she made a batch of hot sauce with her friend, Mallory Stafford, after buying peppers at the Burlington farmers market. The two didn't think much of their creation, but when they gave bottles to neighbors, it was a big hit. Friends soon began approaching Dean and Stafford about purchasing their hot sauce. Fueled by this interest, Dean and Stafford applied for the UVM's Catamount Innovation Fund, a student-led initiative that aids entrepreneurs on campus, and secured funding. Since January, Dean and Stafford have built out Shark Bite Hot Sauce, which is perhaps best known for its cocktail-inspired flavors, such as margarita and bloody mary. The co-founders are currently searching for a community kitchen where they can ramp up production, hoping to begin talks with distributors. As of now, hot sauce bottles — priced at \$9 — are sold through the company's Instagram page.

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