

Go Goldens Drives Home the Importance of Pivoting

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Go Goldens' Evan Eddleston with Pete Audet, president of the resident senate committee of John Knox Village, a retirement community.

Editor's Note: This is the fourth in a series of articles featuring past winners of e-Fest, EIX's undergraduate business plan competition, and their journey since then. For more information on e-Fest visit [here](https://eix.org/e-fest-guide/). (<https://eix.org/e-fest-guide/>)

Go Goldens resulted from Co-Founder Evan Eddleston's research into retirement communities: talking with 75 top level staff members of those communities through Alignable, an app where small business owners can contact one another. He had worked with the company as a customer representative, and in the process learned various valuable tips and tricks for networking.

Through his discussions, the Northeastern University undergraduate learned that transportation processes for retirement communities existed more or less "in the stone age."

"When I looked more into it and when I talked more with retirement communities on my own, I found out it really came down to cost," Eddleston said. "Retirement communities mainly have to provide their own transportation and residence because they need special staff to take care of them. They can't just have an Uber driver pick them up."

Busrite, a routing and tracking system for school buses, won Eddleston and classmate Keith Corso a 2nd place victory at the 2018 e-Fest and a \$40,000 prize. Eddleston eventually left the company due to disagreements with Corso and focused on other projects. He later created the Go Goldens network to help residents of retirement communities coordinate rides more easily and affordably, allowing them to keep active in their community rather than be confined to their rooms.

Go Goldens consists of a smartphone app that tracks driver data from phones to create optimized routes and show the real-time locations of drivers. In turn, a senior from a retirement or senior living community can request a ride through Go Goldens' streamlined interface. This led to two separate apps in the end: a Driver app for tracking data and a Senior app for ride requesting.

When Eddleston decided to navigate his company away from the transportation sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, he learned an important lesson: businesses must know how and when to pivot to meet new circumstances.

Eddleston was taking part in an immersive six month co-op program at the John Knox Village continuous care retirement community in Fort Lauderdale, Florida when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out and forced him to halt beta testing Go Goldens in the community. The testing will resume once transportation processes resume.

"That's when I started to look at how I could pivot my business," he said. "What features can I add to my company to remain relevant in the market right now, and help solve a problem these retirement communities face?"

He first tried developing a screening app for residents traveling in and out of the Village: one that asked questions upon re-entry, such as whether they have any symptoms at the moment, have traveled in the last 14 days, know anyone who has or had COVID, and others. He had called about 50 village residents before realizing that similar screening tools already existed for free. This led Eddleston to pivot again.

Now he is working on developing AI facial recognition cameras to identify seniors moving around in the community and detect their temperatures. Eddleston is coordinating the project with the India-based development company DWP Global, which had helped him with the two transportation apps.



"We haven't made any decisions on if we're going to incorporate these cameras into the software, but I'm at this decision tree now," he said. "I'm at this path where I need to choose if I continue with the transportation side of Go Goldens or if I pivot more to the health side and screening side and cater to COVID-19 right now."

Regardless, Eddleston hopes to eventually take Go Goldens beyond transportation, to monitoring activity levels and other important health variables in senior living members.

Here's a look at the company's progress since 2018.

SNAPSHOT **EIX STARTUP**

The Product:

Go Goldens is a software platform designed to increase the mobility and independence of seniors in retirement communities, beginning in the transportation sector. It includes a Driver app that tracks driver data from phones to create optimized routes and show the real-time locations of drivers. In turn, a senior from a retirement community or senior living community can request a ride on their phone through the easy-to-follow, streamlined interface of the

Senior app.

Founding University:

Northeastern University (2018)

The Potential Market:

Seniors in retirement communities who still want to keep engaged and participate in the community, but whose communities lack funding for adequate transportation tailored to seniors due to high costs. CEO Evan Eddleston explained that his initial vision focuses on people in independent living ages 55 to 65 plus rather than a "traditional nursing home" of 80 to 90-year-olds in beds.

The Minimum Viable Product (MVP):

The company's MVP was the Go Goldens pilot being tested at John Knox Village retirement community in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. The pilot utilized the Senior and Driver apps as well as an Administrator portal.

Stage of Development:

During his internship living at

the John Knox Village, Eddleston learned about the costs of his platform, the utilization rates of community drivers and other variables. He then began implementing his platform in the community as a test run, but that test run was put on hold when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, before he was able to obtain succinct data. He has since pivoted to projects focused on monitoring COVID itself, planning to continue his previous testing once the pandemic ends and transportation resumes.

Annual Sales:

Zero, since the Go Goldens platform had only entered its pilot phase by the time the pandemic began. That test run will remain in stasis for now.

Idea for the Product:

The summer before his first year of college at Northeastern University, Eddleston often accompanied his grandfather on car trips. His grandfather had just moved to a nursing home, and disliked taking nighttime or long-distance drives, so Eddleston agreed to go with him. Accompanying him allowed his grandfather to "continue being a person in the community," in Eddleston's

words.

Traction:

Eddleston started a co-op program in January at John Knox Village, where he had begun testing the Go Goldens platform with the permission of the community COO Bill Pickhardt. That halted with the pandemic.

Go Goldens also talked with various executives at retirement communities to expand their network through the social software platform Alignable, and in response, several retirement communities have expressed interest in their product.

Funding:

Any funds raised to date have come from an angel investor and Eddleston's family members.

Honors and Accolades:

Along with being honored at e-Fest, Go Goldens was inducted into the 10K Entrepreneurs Club that recognizes aspiring entrepreneurs, and the company has earned

several grants and financial awards from Northeastern University and other organizations supporting entrepreneurship.

Biggest Challenge:

While Eddleston faced a "major challenge" in having to pivot his business to because of COVID-19, this also afforded new opportunities for contract tracing using the platform. He instead emphasized another challenge: making the Senior App more user-friendly for seniors. This proved difficult due to a lack of critical research on the use of technology by seniors.

How they're dealing with the challenge:

Eddleston considered what features he could add to remain relevant in the market and satisfy the demand in retirement communities for a solution to COVID-imposed restrictions on travel. He is currently working on AI facial recognition camera software to monitor COVID in the senior residents of John Knox Village. He

has not yet fully decided whether he wants to “continue with the transportation side of Go Goldens” or “pivot more to the health side and screening side” relevant to the pandemic. On the subject of a user-friendly interface for seniors, Eddleston learned much about interface organization and regulating information volume from holding focus groups at Northeastern University and talking with seniors in the field.

Teammates:

Go Goldens teammates include Co-Founder Kimberly Eddleston, General Manager Robert Eddleston, Technical Advisor James Beal, Advisor Doug Sutton and Advisor Gary White.

Mentors and Advisors:

EIX contributor James Beale helped introduce Eddleston to the Indian development company DWP Global, whom Eddleston would partner with to work on the two apps. Eddleston also said he has two or three mentors he talks to on a weekly basis.

Joseph M. Brito Jr., president and CEO of the C.B. Utility Company, taught Eddleston

different ways to solve problems, ask the right questions and form good business partnerships as the CEO of a company. Move My Mom, LLC owner Doug Sutton also talked with Eddleston regularly about leadership and the senior living industry.

Lastly, Eddleston credited Gerry Stryker (CEO) and Bill Pickhardt (COO) of John Knox Village for pushing him to develop his business and teaching him how to adapt his technology to improve the lives of seniors in the community.

Resources at college that helped:

Eddleston cited countless entrepreneurship clubs and resources available at Northeastern, such as design studios to create a logo and engineering studios to help design a product. He also frequently used his school email in his outreach to retirement community executives, saying that the student perspective can help one “get in front of business owners and executives.”

Several professors also gave guidance to help him develop his business: "For example, I did an Independent study with Professor Jay

Mulki, who is a leading expert in marketing and sales management. Throughout the semester, he helped me develop an extensive marketing plan and create a sales pitch for senior living communities. Additionally, I enrolled in a Market Research class with Professor Felicia Lassk, and Go Goldens became the focus of a team project."

**Advice for
aspiring Student
Entrepreneurs:**

Eddleston says that if a company provided value before the pandemic, its people should stay positive that their value will also be recognized after COVID-19 passes. He also recommends that aspiring student entrepreneurs understand their market and to listen to anyone inside or outside the market who wants to talk with them.

"Another thing too, don't be greedy as an entrepreneur," Eddleston said. "I think the most important thing is to get your product out there and get your product in the hands of the people who are using it -- both for marketing purposes and for research purposes, to learn

if it's working or not and what can improve and what not to. You never know what works and what doesn't work until it's actually in the hands of the people using it."

"And of course, good things always happen when you're generous," he added. "So never be greedy."

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