

## Entrepreneur Day Spotlights Power of Innovation

By **Andy Meek**

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Already in recent weeks, Moziah “Mo” Bridges, the 12-year-old founder of the Memphis-based Mo’s Bows bow tie business, has appeared on the hit ABC show “Shark Tank.”



### **BRIDGES**

If the exposure alone wasn’t enough, Bridges also impressed fashion mogul and “Shark Tank” panelist Daymond John into offering to mentor him.

Next up – in addition to continuing to build his business, of course – Bridges will be a special guest speaker next week at the Tennessee Entrepreneur Day at the FedEx Institute of Technology at the University of Memphis.

The May 13 conference is being sponsored by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and The Council of State Governments, the latter of which Tennessee Senate Majority Leader [Mark Norris](#) is the 2014 chair.

Bridges’ is the kind of story Norris said the conference wants to highlight and hold up as an example of the transformative potential of entrepreneurship.

Bridges' business is focused on fashionable bow ties that he first started designing and sewing after his grandmother showed him how to use her scrap fabric to make and sell his own bows when he was only 9 years old. Bridges has since made a flurry of national TV and media appearances. And his business has grown, with his bow ties now sold in stores in Memphis and beyond, in addition to being available from his website.

Part of the event at the U of M, which is open to the public, will include a panel and part of it will include individual presentations.

Besides Norris, speakers for the event include [Start Co.](#) president [Andre Fowlkes](#), Memphis Bioworks Foundation executive director Steve Bares, Unilever manufacturing director [Larry Gibson](#), Launch Tennessee president and CEO [Charlie Brock](#), plus a variety of other state and business leaders.

Fowlkes said he's looking forward to connecting with other regional leaders at the event "and discussing our best practices to collaborate with the state of Tennessee to build digital entrepreneurs."

"My chairman's initiative for 2014 is workforce development and education," Norris said. "We call it 'State Pathways to Prosperity.' This is really going to be a two-year initiative. And this is the first year. Entrepreneurs are a critical part of the equation. I'm doing a lot of work all over the U.S. right now on this as everybody is trying to ramp up and close the skills gap in advanced manufacturing."

There's been a resurgence of such manufacturing activity in the U.S., Norris said, but the general workforce hasn't been well prepared for those jobs.

"We're trying to skate to the puck as best we can," he said. "There's a lot of catching up to do. It's very exciting to face this opportunity, but it takes a lot of effort."

That includes bringing entrepreneurs and innovators together for things like next week's event. In advance of the event, organizers pointed to how bringing a new product to market can be daunting, including the process of accessing capital and continuing on to the navigation of the legal and regulatory landscape.

With some of that in mind, other speakers for the May 13 event will include Jason Wiens, lead policy engagement manager for the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation; [Jeff Chapman](#), manager with the Economic Development Tax Incentives Project for Pew Charitable Trusts; and [Ted Townsend](#), assistant commissioner of strategy for the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, among others.

"There's a lot being said today about the skills gap in advanced manufacturing, and what we're trying to do in workforce development is get people with a certificate or a degree and get them a job or, if they have a job, get them an apprenticeship and move them up the ladder," Norris said.