From UCCS to global impact[1]
[2]

On Oct. 4, the University of Colorado Showcase will bring together all that is great about entrepreneurship and innovation across the four campuses.

Among those taking part in the event, helping to represent the CU community's diverse industries and perspectives, is UCCS alumnus Rafael De La Vega. He is the founder and CEO of Salt, a sports-tech company specializing in odor-control solutions for athletic applications.

Born and raised in La Paz, Bolivia, De La Vega has always been driven by a passion for combining practical solutions with cutting-edge technology. He successfully patented the technology that powers Salt's unique products. Beyond entrepreneurial achievements, De La Vega is deeply committed to contributing to the growth and vibrancy of Colorado's startup and innovation ecosystem.

Attendees can meet De La Vega and other CU innovators at the CU Showcase, which will bring together ventures spanning quantum tech, AI, health care and the arts, all tackling big challenges for our state and world. The gathering celebrates their hard work and aims to spark serendipitous connections and creative collaborations that will shape the future of Colorado and our university system.

The CU Showcase[3] is set for 1-6 p.m. Oct. 4 at the CU Anschutz Medical Campus. Register for the event here[4]; learn more about the Innovation & Entrepreneurship Initiative here[5].

Here's a Q&A with De La Vega:

Why did you choose UCCS?

I felt that it was an environment that I could thrive in. This is because I felt an openness to new ideas and my sometimes unorthodox way of being. I felt that most other institutions I had evaluated were too rigid in their approach and knew that I would not be able to grow in such an environment.

How did your entrepreneurial journey begin. Did you always want to be an entrepreneur, or did you come at it from a different direction?

I had the desire to pursue entrepreneurship from a young age. The journey to build what is now Salt started in a high school entrepreneurship class sophomore year. Since then, I knew that one way or another I wanted to end up building companies.

Did UCCS impact your entrepreneurial journey? If so, how?

Absolutely. It was through UCCS and their entrepreneurship efforts that I was able to secure our first outside capital via the Torch Grants and Scale to a Million program. Through this program, I was also able to connect with the most impactful mentors of my career so far. These are people who have facilitated invaluable connections to capital, professional soccer teams, and other partnerships that have played a pivotal role in our growth and success thus far.

You have said that you would like to see Colorado be a "a global hub for innovation." What do you mean by that? And what do you think it takes for that to happen? How does your own company, Salt, fit into this?

I believe that Colorado, in playing to our strengths, can become a global hub for innovation in some key industries: sports tech, human performance, and environmental technologies, among others.

We have the Olympic committee and many national governing bodies for specific sports headquartered here. We are a state that culturally values an active lifestyle as well as the outdoors.

In order for this to happen, I believe we have to further shift the mindset of our impact as a state to the global stage and

continue to foster collaboration and inclusion in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. We also must continue to develop avenues for access to local capital for our homegrown successes to keep the fruits of successful exits within the state rather than going to the coasts (where a large amount of the growth capital comes from).

Many of these processes are well underway and I am very encouraged by the progress I have seen here in my time building Salt. I also believe that Salt plays a role in this by growing our impact and footprint as a company on the global stage, by helping attract outside talent, helping cultivate local talent, and making the many connections in sports that we're developing available to the Colorado ecosystem.

- By Megan Barbour, I&E Initiative Adviser

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