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The Veteran Fund is an early-stage venture capital firm based in Silicon Valley that invests in high-growth startups and dual-use technologies, led by top founders with a military background. It counts Deepak Chopra as one of its limited partners.

Helping Veterans in Construction

“(The $100K) means the opportunity to transform the construction industry and beyond — an industry that employs so many veterans with the necessary transferrable and soft skills that the construction sector needs — with the support of The Veteran Fund and the military community,” Mills said.

The Veteran Fund General Partner Mike Sherbakov said many startups, particularly those with a connection to the military community, “need that first round of institutional capital,” and that The Veteran Fund helps fill a crucial “pre-seed gap” in the startup lifecycle.

Nearly 130 pitches were made virtually to The Veteran Fund investment committee, which narrowed the field down to a group of 12. Then, the top five companies were invited to make in-person pitches in Las Vegas.

It was there that Mills shared the vision of Pixly, impressing Sherbakov and The Veteran Fund’s other general partners Ryan Micheletti, Lisa Song Sutton and Justin Nahama.

Looking for a triple threat of team, product and market, a startup run by a veteran of the military that fits its motto of “protection American future through venture capital,” and a company that could disrupt the commercialized market, Pixly — and Mills in particular — won them over.

“Lee is an incredible founder,” Sherbakov said. “His desire to mentor and elevate the ecosystem of startups speaks volumes about his character.”

Pixly was originally an idea born out of the Springboard program at CONNECT San Diego, where Mills is a mentor. Springboard seeks to elevate entrepreneurs by offering educational programming, providing mentorship, making introductions and assisting with access to capital.

In 2017 through CONNECT, Mills met Patrick Caughey, an architecture professional working with historic buildings, with an app idea to solve photo documentation problems he experienced in construction. The idea stayed with Caughey, but never gained much traction.

Fast forward to two years later, when Mills said he saw a need for this exact app. He spoke with Caughey and the two partnered as co-founders, then brought on Thayer Flynn, a third-generation developer, and construction technology.

Pixly is in the midst of a million-dollar seed round, and that the money will go toward its current push for new markets, sales and marketing, facilities management, inspections and other field services.

It will also help toward Pixly’s push for additional features. Mills said the company is working on perfecting its use of artificial intelligence that will recognize what is in each photo to make for even faster organization and stronger collaboration.

Pixly

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incredible work of our entire campus community to put our students and our region first in all that we do.”

CSUSM has been dedicated to student success and social mobility since its founding in 1959.

From first-year programs to learning communities, community-based learning opportunities to internships, undergraduate research and more, the university works to foster deep learning and academic success by engaging students in meaningful and innovative educational experiences — all especially beneficial to underserved student groups.

CSUSM is also a major contributor of bachelor’s degrees to the region’s workforce, with about 80% of students remaining in the region following graduation.

Since Neufeldt became president in 2019, social mobility has become even more woven into CSUSM’s mission. It is a pillar of a five-year strategic plan unveiled last spring by Neufeldt.

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In May, the university received a $1 million gift from longtime donors Steve and Laura Wagner to create a fund devoted to social mobility and hosted a two-day National Social Mobility Symposium in June.

“I look forward to continuing our efforts to be a national model in the area of student success and social mobility — building on the important work already in place and taking it to new heights through innovation, collaboration and inclusion,” Neufeldt said.