

Pixly

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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 transferable 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 lifeline.

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 fit its motto of “protecting America’s future through venture capital;” and a company that could disrupt the commercial 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 of 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 firsthand 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 professional, to launch Pixly in late 2019.

“I knew Lee through other startups, and he brought me in to help with finance and operations, to help scale and grow the business,” Flynn said. “I’m very excited by the news about the \$100,000 pitch. A lot of credit goes to Lee, for his perseverance and his ability to pitch. My hat’s off to him.”

Caughey echoed Flynn’s kudos, calling Mills’ win at the pitch contest “an amazing accomplishment.”

“It really demonstrates his commitment to and passion for what he’s building,” Caughey said. “It’s no easy thing to start a company during a pandemic, but Lee made it work. This latest milestone shows there’s nothing holding him or Pixly back.”

Since launching, the team of three has built an iOS app, launched a web app version, secured myriad letters of intent from top general contractors and generated hundreds of early users along with high-profile pilot projects.

Funds to Push Out New Features

Mills said that Pixly will be using the newly acquired funds to enhance its product with new features and support early customers along with a greater focus on sales and marketing to grow faster.



Patrick Caughey
Co-founder
Pixly

Mobilizing

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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 1989.

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 a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution with a diverse student population. At least 52% of graduates are the first in their families to earn a bachelor’s degree. One in nine students is a veteran, service member or military-affiliated dependent.

“The success of our students and their social mobility is the very core of our mission,” said **Carl Kemnitz**, CSUSM provost and vice president of academic affairs. “When families send their children to college, the goal is often upward

mobility. Taking that a step further, while an important part of our goal is career readiness, for us at CSUSM, in addition, it’s about what our students do upon graduation. How they lead, give back, innovate and contribute to solving the most critical issues of our time.”

CSUSM is also a major contributor of bachelor’s degree holders 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 the

Mills came to San Diego while serving aboard the USS Constellation. After serving four years and earning a Navy Achievement Medal, he completed design school while working full-time as a telemarketer. He then began his tech startup career as one of the first marketing hires for Backup.com, followed by Anonymizer, MojoPages and Raken, where he became an expert in construction technology.

Pixly falls along that line, helping construction, facility and real estate professionals save time and money by making it easy to shoot project photographs with an iPhone, tag them, organize them, share them and collaborate instantly from anywhere.

Pixly also reduces the risk of disputes and litigation while making it easy to find photos quickly in one secure cloud. Mills said that 30% of projects have disputes and that “a photograph can be worth 1,000 words – or millions of dollars.”

Mills said 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. ■

university unveiled last spring: “The Power of CSUSM,” and has taken strides toward the objectives outlined in it.

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. ■

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

HIRINGS, PROMOTIONS, BOARD MEMBERS AND SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS IN SAN DIEGO



REAL ESTATE Announcement



Douglas Elliman Realty is pleased to announce that Jason Saks has joined The Altman Brothers team. A top agent with luxury market experience, Saks has closed more than \$100 million in sales volume since 2020. Saks will take on his new role at the brokerage’s San Diego office located at 1615 Murray Canyon Rd, Suite 110, Mission Valley East.

Helmed by Bravo’s Million Dollar Listing Los Angeles stars Matt and Josh Altman alongside Josh’s wife, Heather, the Altman Brothers Team was ranked one of California’s top teams in 2021, with more than \$1.46 billion in sales volume. The team’s expansion to San Diego is a testament to their growth in the state, propelled by record-shattering sales and iconic listings.

With his strong work ethic and exceptional ability to craft a deal, Saks is one of San Diego’s leading luxury real estate agents. His notable sales include 7411 Hillside in La Jolla, which sold for \$4.6 million, 7756 Saint Andrews and 7364 Saint Andrews in Rancho Santa Fe, which closed for \$6.15 million and \$4.35 million, respectively.

“Jason is a force to reckon with when it comes to the San Diego market,” said Stephen Kotler, CEO of Douglas Elliman Realty’s Western Region. “He is an agent who embodies passion, ingenuity and grace – a powerful combination of traits that underscores every one of his achievements and client relationships. I am thrilled to welcome him to our firm and to one of the best teams in the business.”

The Altman Brothers’ have consistently made waves in San Diego real estate. They double-ended the sale for the iconic Razor House that closed for a record-breaking price of \$20.8 million. The team’s current listings in the region include 6340 Camino De La Costa in La Jolla listed at \$45,000,000, 1127 F Ave, Coronado listed at \$32,000,000 and 532 Neptune Ave, Encinitas listed at 19,995,000.

“Jason brings a lot to the table for us,” said Josh. “His experience in the industry combined with his encyclopedic knowledge of the market will allow him to offer our clients a Big Picture sales experience.”

“The team has grown tremendously in the recent years,” added Matt. “I’m confident that Jason’s comprehensive expertise will help us accelerate that growth as we continue to expand.”

“I have always admired Jason’s work ethic and personal character,” said Heather. “He is known to go the extra mile for his clients, and I am thrilled that he will be joining our team.”

Saks grew up in an entrepreneurial family in Long Island, NY, and entered the family business of successful retail stores across New York City. After relocating to the West Coast in 2003 and settling in San Diego, where he continued to own and operate retail stores, he became involved in real estate investments, renovating properties and acquiring personal real estate. He later launched a direct-to-consumer manufacturing company with the founders and executives of TUMI, before exiting to focus on real estate. A committed Californian, Saks lives in Rancho Santa Fe with his wife and daughter but still makes time to visit his hometown of New York.

Jason can be reached at jason.saks@elliman.com