

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**NORTHWEST ILLINOIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
ANNOUNCES NEW GENZ FUND AWARD FOR SOUND SAFE.ai**

HANOVER, ILLINOIS - Northwest Illinois Economic Development (NWILED), along with Illinois Bank and Trust, a division of UMB, has announced the presentation of the 10th Genz Small Business Development Fund Award to SoundSafe.ai of Galena, Illinois. The check for \$10,000 from the Genz Small Business Development Fund was issued to Owners Johnny Stevenson and Hamad Dada on the afternoon of Sept. 17, 2025.

SoundSafe.ai is developing state-of-the-art robust audio watermarking, accurate tracking and reporting, including real-time audio deepfake detection, for multiple industries and public agencies. They presently employ four full-time staff members and have 13 interns. According to Stevenson and Dada, the Genz Fund money was used to purchase two new NVIDIA DGX Spark systems, which are compact, desktop AI supercomputers designed for developers to prototype, fine-tune, and run large AI models locally.

"Through the Genz Small Business Development Fund award we've secured cutting-edge NVIDIA Edge AI devices. These tools will speed up our AI work and power secure systems that help local law enforcement and protect critical infrastructure," said Dada. "Beyond the tech, this investment strengthens community safety, supports good jobs and training in our region, and expands our impact into public safety, so people, businesses, and first responders can count on faster insights when it matters most."

"We are honored to receive this support from NWILED and Illinois Bank and Trust, as it allows us to accelerate technology that can truly save lives. This award provides the momentum we need to launch our pilot projects and ensure schools, cities, businesses, and communities are safer," said Stevenson. "At SoundSafe.ai we believe national security starts at the local level, protecting people where they live, work, and learn. With our multi-modal intelligence platform, fusing audio, video, and sensor data, we don't just detect threats, we anticipate them. This investment helps us move closer to our mission of defending tomorrow, today."

"I've never been prouder of these hard-working entrepreneurs Johnny Stevenson and Hamad Dada. Seeing their careers develop firsthand has been an inspiration to all young entrepreneurs and local Galena talent," said Gavin Doyle, UMB Private Wealth Management, VP and Financial Advisor and NWILED Board of Directors. "I was happy with the decision of the NWILED Executive Committee to move forward and honor SoundSafe.ai a well-deserved award. A local Galena success story in the making."

On hand to congratulate Stevenson and Dada were the staff and interns of SoundSafe.ai, members of the NWILED Staff and Board, supporters, and members of the Galena Area Chamber of Commerce.

“Seeing SoundSafe.ai evolve over the past several years has been extraordinary, and NWILED is thrilled to help them take their startup into the future,” said David Schmit, NWILED Regional Director. “Beyond their professional endeavors, their level of volunteerism in the community shouldn’t go unnoticed. They are very much engaged, and we are proud to have SoundSafe.ai be a part of the growing cluster of tech here in northwest Illinois.”

SoundSafe.ai is open by appointment and is located at 234 N Main Street in Galena, Illinois, 61036. Interested people with questions can email Johnny at [johnny@soundsafe.ai](mailto:johnny@soundsafe.ai) or Hamad at [hamad@soundsafe.ai](mailto:hamad@soundsafe.ai). Their web address is [www.SoundSafe.ai](http://www.SoundSafe.ai).

#### ABOUT THE GENZ SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT FUND:

Established in 2020, the Genz Small Business Development Fund was formed by the late John "Jack" Genz of Galena to help retailers, small manufacturers, wholesalers and hospitality industry genres, along with farmers and food processors in the Galena Trade Area and can be used to help fund capital projects, to purchase an existing business or for startup and pilot projects. The fund is administered by Illinois Bank & Trust, a division of UMB, and is marketed by Northwest Illinois Economic Development. Since first awarded in 2020 a total of \$78,302 has now been dispersed through the fund.

#### ABOUT NWILED:

Northwest Illinois Economic Development was created by the Jo-Carroll Energy Board of Directors to spearhead economic development structures, funding and progress in Jo Daviess, Carroll, and Whiteside counties in Northwest Illinois. Now in its 16th year of successful service, NWILED continues to be a regional development entity concentrating on growing the economy and public/private partnerships.

NWILED promotes economic development by fostering business growth and assisting expanding and relocating businesses. The organization aids in determining these needs for growth with cooperation from government and business partners.

NWILED encourages entrepreneurs by assisting with access to resources to begin and grow their businesses and employs all available resources to create a welcoming business environment, aligning the skills of the available workforce with the needs of businesses, and building political and economic capital.

NWILED’s commitment to success also produces programs, ventures and events that nurture educational business growth and overall business community involvement.