

# EXCLUSIVE: Cincinnati startups band together to create hundreds of masks for healthcare industry

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Cincinnati startups are banding together to create protective masks for workers in the region's healthcare industry.

The beer hall at [Cintrifuse](#), a hub of the region's startup ecosystem located at 1313 Vine St. in Over-the-Rhine, is typically bustling with founders, advisers and funders talking about the next big things in tech. And then it sat empty, as the global coronavirus pandemic forced people to take their work home.

Now the beer hall is buzzing with activity again, but of a different kind – 50 3-D printers are working around the clock to churn out protective face masks for the region's healthcare workers, who are facing a critical shortage of personal protective equipment.

It started with digital analytics firm InfoTrust's CEO [Alex Yastrebenetsky](#). His company has long had a foundation that it supported in times of plenty. Rather than retreat inward and put up the walls and try to weather the pandemic as a company, he wanted to do something that would help the broader city and region. That's when he came across designs recommended by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for 3-D printed protective masks.

He told me that in times of fear it's important for people to have something to rally behind to help people get beyond their fears.

"In 'Groundhog Day' once Bill Murray got away from his selfishness he was able to escape the repetition," Yastrebenetsky said. "I want to be able to look my kids in the eye a year from now and tell them I did everything I could."

Despite being closed to the public as Ohio urged its residents to shelter in place and avoid contact with others in an effort to stem the spread of the coronavirus, Cintrifuse performed exactly as the organization was intended to, as a conduit to connect startups, big companies and the resources to help both of them grow.

Cintrifuse director [John Steiger](#) connected Yastrebenetsky with [Greg LaLonde](#), CEO of Polar3D, a company that has created the Polar Cloud, an online platform for 3-D printing that was intended to allow educational institutions to manage their own 3-D printers, files, students and curricula from a single place.

"There has to be a bias toward action and a sense of urgency," LaLonde told me. "We told Alex we could get 100 printers to you in a day. We set them up and networked them all on a platform."

While the NIH has reviewed and approved the 3-D printed masks, they are not N95 compliant. They are more protective than cloth masks, but best suited for senior care facilities or healthcare workers who are not on the frontlines of infection in places like emergency rooms.

Polar3D has 50 of its 100 machines operating around the clock in Union Hall and can produce more than 2,100 masks per week. Those masks are currently being evaluated by local healthcare providers, and the designs will be adjusted as needed. Masks can be requested by filling out a form on [Cintrifuse's website](#) and the masks will be produced as long as there is demand for them.

Funds for the 3-D printers and the production of masks is seeded with \$40,000 from the InfoTrust Foundation, but others can contribute to the [#SuperHeroesWearMasks](#) campaign.

"This is StartupCincy at its best," Cintrifuse CEO [Pete Blackshaw](#) said. "Entrepreneurs, innovators and our startup ecosystem coming together at a time of crisis to meet an extreme need in a crazy-fast, crowd-sourced, crowd-funded, incredibly resourceful way. I could not be more proud of our partners and our Cintrifuse team."

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PROVIDED BY CINTRIFUSE

A group of 50 3-D printers, and growing, are creating protective masks for local healthcare workers around the clock inside of Cintrifuse's Union Hall.