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A \$10,000 Idea

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Salud del Sol, an innovative new business from a team of University of Dayton students aimed at bringing the "health of the sun" to medical treatment in developing countries, took home a \$10,000 first prize to help get the venture off the ground.

Winning the 2008 University of Dayton Business Plan Competition, the team of Lauren Dokes, Lori Hanna, Daniel Hensel and Anna Young created a business plan to develop and market solar cookers and solar-powered sterilizers. The plan will also set up companies in Nicaraguan villages to produce the equipment.

"Salud del Sol is a truly innovative entrepreneurial effort that could not only save millions of lives but could also aid thousands of poor people in developing countries," said Dean McFarlin, chair of the management and marketing department and the NCR Professor of Global Leadership Development at UD.

McFarlin said the focus of the competition is business, and the Salud del Sol project exemplifies the philosophy of social entrepreneurship.

"Social entrepreneurs can help communities tackle some of their biggest problems and some of the best ideas can be scaled up to the point where you're making a real difference in the world," he said.

Salud del Sol tapped other expertise at the University including engineering, international development and social entrepreneurship, according to project member Lori Hanna, a mechanical engineering major. The project – the basis of her senior honors thesis – grew from an internship in rural Nicaragua through UD 's Engineers in Technical Humanitarian Opportunities of Service-learning (ETHOS) program.

"Nurses have to travel to bigger health centers or hospitals to use sterilizers, sometimes traveling long distances by bus and spending precious time and money to have access to the equipment," she said.

The solar sterilizers, also called autoclaves, fit inside solar cookers, which use reflected sunlight to cook food. Hanna saw a business opportunity for rural Nicaraguan women to market the cookers and autoclaves. The team also won the \$1,000 first prize in the elevator pitch portion of the competition in November. They were mentored by David Ganzsarto, CEO of Alternate Solutions Homecare.

While the team honed the business plan, the Design and Manufacturing Clinic of UD 's School of Engineering, was working on perfecting the design.

Presentations from five finalist teams were judged on whether they presented business plans for feasible, profitable and innovative products worthy of going to market. Other winners were:

Second place and \$5,000 went to Wheelin ' Water, by Brian Lastovich and James Parks. Wheelin ' Water is a hydration system for large, outdoor events and sports, where being able to get water to people quickly is crucial. Their first sale came from a team who saw the prototype being tested on the opposite side of the field. Robert Miller, president and CEO, Excellence in Motivation, mentored this team.

Third place and \$2,500 went to DecX, by Patrick Bertke, Sean Mead, John Van Leeuwen and Mike Weaver. DecX is a modular decking system using composite materials that snap into place. It 's targeted at homeowners who want an affordable, high-quality deck without the costs associated with a custom-built wood deck. The team was mentored by Jack Lohbeck, director of business consulting, Battelle & Battelle.

Fourth place and \$1,000 went to EZ Mileage, by David Campobenedetto, Nick Grilliot and Vince Pecoraro. EZ Mileage is a device plugged into a car to track business travel, aimed at business travelers who need to track mileage for reimbursement or tax purposes. Greg Popham, Business Development manager for Motorola, served as mentor. Pecoraro was part of the winning team in the 2007 competition.

Fifth place and \$1,000 went to Sonne Light Sentry, an automated home lighting system. Elyse Dull, Ken Janulis, Matt Poeppelman, Ryan Smith, and Jeff Teubl. The system is targeted at homeowners who want the security and convenience of a home lighting system but can't afford a custom-designed system. The team was mentored by Richard Hern, co-founder, Crown Partners.

The University of Dayton 's School of Business Administration launched the competition in 2006 to help teach entrepreneurship and give students an advantage in the job market, McFarlin said. It is open to any University of Dayton student; outside businesses may enter if a UD student is on the team.

McFarlin said the number of entries and prize money doubled from last year. A record 59 entries competed for prizes totaling nearly \$22,000, he said, including 12 projects from outside the University community.

Last year's competition has already spawned two new businesses, with GetQuick Training, a computerized sports agility trainer that won first place, in business and making sales, according to McFarlin.

"Future competitions will also do even more to encourage cross-disciplinary teams and community participation as well as support entries involving social entrepreneurship and technological innovation," he said.

The University of Dayton is nationally recognized for developing student entrepreneurs. Its entrepreneurship program has been rated the fifth-best in the U.S. for the past two years by Entrepreneur magazine and The Princeton Review. Students in the program become entrepreneurs, with many opportunities to learn by running actual businesses.

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