A Competition of Bright Ideas

Hazelnut Pilot Project takes first place in competition that puts entrepreneurs to the test.

BY MARY JANE SKALA
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KEARNEY — If hazelnut shrubs began sprouting all over Nebraska, thank Andrew Pedersen.

His Hazelnut Pilot Project idea won the $1,000 first prize in the second annual Central Nebraska Business Idea Contest Wednesday. His idea was to plant 200 hybrid hazelnut shrubs and harvest the hazelnut oil. That oil could mean big things for both food and fuel in central Nebraska.

"This shrub is a hybrid that is being grown in our climate for the first time," he told a group of 50 people at KRAVE at 2202 Central Ave., where the finals took place. "There are new varieties for the Midwest."

Pedersen of Grand Island grew up on a farm. He now works for US Bank and is studying for his MBA at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

The $500 second-place prize went to UNK student Sandy Evans and her Bovine Lifeline, a microchip that would be implanted in cattle so ranchers and farmers can keep tabs on them via computer.

Third prize of $250 went to Michael Meyer, a self-employed resident of Kearney, for Benefit Houdini, a health-care business that would offer significant savings to businesses and employees. He calls the plan "Unshackling business, one benefit plan at a time."

"We welcomed any age, any idea. Our goal was to improve the entrepreneurial capacity and climate in central Nebraska."

Shawn Kaskie, director for the Center of Rural Research and Development at the College of Business and Technology at UNK.

TOP-10 FINALISTS AND THEIR PROJECTS

- Chaney Black of Kearney, "Two Rivers Storage"
- Tyler Clifford of Kearney, "Alcohol Detector"
- Blaine Drozd of Genoa, "Tim's Money Commitment"
- Eric Erickson of Grand Island, "Great Outdoor Celebrations"
- Sandy Evans of Haigler, "Bovine Lifeline"
- Michael Meyer of Kearney, "Benefit Houdini"
- Andrew Pedersen of Grand Island, "Hazelnut Pilot Project"
- Sam Widger of Kearney, "Inspire"
- Vincent Tesinsky of Weston, "Double Up Feeder"
- Steve Wahl of Loomis, "Lawn Debbi"

were nervous.

Some, like UNK student Blaine Drozd, had the audience laughing with his "Time is Money" idea, which taught him how much time he wasted.

Starting with $360, he subtracted money for wasted time. The first day he wasted 65 percent of his time; the second day, 50 percent; and the third day, "I was $25 down the drain," he said.

"I wasted $140 worth of time this week," he said in his video. "Time well-spent is not money wasted."

Drozd, like 32 of the UNK contestants, is a student in Management 400, a UNK class on entrepreneurship. He admitted that he procrastinated in preparing for the competition and said he wasn't sure how his idea would make money.

"I could start with friends, talk to organizations, maybe publish a book," he told the judges. "I learned that high school doesn't prepare you for college. I used to think college was just a financial investment, but there's so much more to it."

Master of ceremonies Leslie Means, who won first prize at a similar but larger UNK competition last spring, told Adams that he could become a motivational speaker. Judges named him one of five finalists in the competition.

JUDGES

Judges who determined the 10 finalists, and the type of entries they judged, included:

- Greg Shea, president of the Tri-City Storm, service-related ideas;
- Eric Hellriegel, former owner of Pane Bello and founder of Community Options, health care and social services; and
- Odee Ingersoll, wants to improve the entrepreneurial capacity and climate in central Nebraska.
"Our goal was to improve the entrepreneurial capacity and climate in central Nebraska." 

In its second year, the contest was sponsored by three Kearney entities — the Center for Rural Research and Development in the College of Business and Technology; Ode Ingersoll, director of the Nebraska Business Development Center in the UNK College of Business and Technology; and Dan Hoffman, chief operating officer of Invest Nebraska.

One by one, nine finalists — the tenth was unable to be there — presented their two-minute videos, then took questions from judges. Some wore ties. Some wore jeans. Some

SHAWN KASKIE, director for the Center for Rural Research and Development in the College of Business and Technology at UNK, directed the competition.
the information in one place."

Vincent Tesinsky of Weston showed the crowd a Double-Up Feeder, a device that mounts to most standard bale feeders and carries two bales of hay to feed cattle.

"With this, your wife will be thrilled to do the chores tonight. This keeps your boots clean as you feed cattle," he said. He already has a patent on this device, which costs about $200 to build.

He showed it at the Gateway Farm Show at the Buffalo County Fairgrounds this week, adding, "When I go to farm shows it's hard to keep the cattle fed, but my wife just pulls the lever."

Other inventions included:

- Chaney Black, a junior from Spencer, created a storage facility for boats and larger vehicles that would serve boaters on both the Niobrara and Missouri rivers. She called her project Two Rivers Storage.
- Steve Wahls, Kearney, who has spent 35 years in manufacturing, created the Lawn Debbi, a device that fits on a trailer or pickup and holds up to 3,000 pounds of grass clippings. It is loaded and emptied from the side.

"It has no trailers to disconnect or equipment to unload," he said. "I'm a landlord. I mow a lot of lawns."
- Sam Widger of Kearney, an auto mechanic for 23 years, hopes to become the "Hybrid Go-To Guy" by becoming an expert in hybrids.

He rescued a Prius that had been "left for dead at a wrecking place," bought a new battery for $400, and has driven it 10,000 miles. He gets 39 miles per gallon in town and 53 mpg on the highway. "No one in Kearney knows how to work on hybrids," he said.
- Tyler Clifford, a UNK student, created a device that fits over a steering wheel that senses alcohol and prevents a car from starting if the driver has been drinking.