

BUSINESS

From page 1

they'll start one, but a lot of them do," says Dr. Gerald Segal, associate professor of management in the Entrepreneurship program. "So many of them express goals of having careers as entrepreneurs, and I think that's where many are headed."

One of professor Segal's recommendations to his students is that they pursue starting a business early on. "When reality gets in the way of a dream, it's tough to give up a day job," he reasons. "I suggest that they get going while they're young and can live on macaroni and cheese."

Judging of the Entrepreneurship business plans is two-tiered. On the first level, college faculty narrows the field to three finalists. The final judging is done by actual business owners and members of the Small Business Development Center.

Funded by both the Small Business Administration and FGCU, the SBDC works with local businesses. One way the center is able to help is by analyzing a company's complete operation and making recommendations for improvement.

"We counsel start-up and existing businesses," says Suzanne Specht, associate director of the SBDC. "It's been difficult for small businesses to get capitalization from banks. In light of that barrier, we're working with clients to make sure that they have solid business plans."

"Hooking our small business clients up with student teams from the Entrepreneurship class has been very successful. The small business owners love, love, love that program."

Book smarts in the digital age

Michael Zecchino, the 2008 Business Plan Development winner, developed MyCollegeBookBag.com. The business, set to launch in 2011, provides digital college textbooks. Mr. Zecchino says he's found the e-books, which will be available for almost half the price of hardback books, have a definite appeal to the publishing community.

"Publishers make their money on their first printing of a book, but after that they're in competition with the used-book market," he explains. "They're forced to keep issuing new editions to stay in the game, and that gets expensive."

Mr. Zecchino got the idea for the business two years ago, after shelling out \$750 for a semester's worth of books. "I was standing there with two arms full of books, and I looked around and saw all of these students with laptops," he recalls. "That's when it hit me: Why are we buying all of these books when we all have laptops?"

With his prototype for MyCollegeBookBag.com developed, Mr. Zecchino, who graduated earlier this month, is now working to get a publisher to accept the product — a prerequisite, he feels, to venture funding. Talks are in the early stages with McGraw-Hill.

"Things are proceeding slowly, but it's looking good," he says.

The e-reader books allow students to zoom in, add notes, highlight information and search the entire text with ease. The dual-page format looks like a book and creates a similar experience when pages are turned.

Early indications are that his audience — a demographic reared on computers — is extremely receptive to the concept. He's getting hits on his Web site, which won't officially be up and running until next year, and a Facebook student forum is encouraging.

Mr. Zecchino started the business with John Baker, a fellow FGCU student who's also Mr. Zecchino's childhood friend from Rochester, N.Y. "As soon as I started thinking about it, I got him

involved," he says.

Because he sought guidance from the SBDC early on, he also had the benefit of a team of FGCU Entrepreneurship students studying his business, the competition and the publishing industry and making recommendations.

"I'm a big fan of the Entrepreneurship concentration at FGCU," he says. "It has helped me tremendously in defining my goals."

Sweet success

Doug Bladich, who co-owns Dolce Vita Hair Salon on Fifth Avenue South in Naples with his wife Heather, is a 2003 FGCU graduate whose senior thesis was a business plan for the salon that incorporated both a communication model and a business model.

"The business plan is basically the nuts and bolts of any business," Mr. Bladich, who majored in communication, explains. "The communication model was equally important because it identified elements that would set our business apart from the competition."

The Bladiches opened Dolce Vita in 2006. "When we went to a bank for funding, having a business plan in place made things easier," he says. "When we went to incorporate, everything went smoothly."

Green and clean

Green cleaning came into focus while Kylee Snyder and Michael Brinkman were hitting the books and earning management degrees two years ago. As part of their concentration in Entrepreneurship, they put together a business model that's taken them into the world with Green Leaf Commercial Cleaning.

Their initial goal was to create a business offering an environmentally friendly service. Cleaning seemed like a natural application.

"We won first place for our business model, and that gave us publicity and seed money (\$500), and so we went ahead and started the company," Ms. Snyder says.

To manage costs and remain competitive, they mix their own Green Seal certified, chemical-free, non-toxic cleaning solutions. Their equipment requires less water than used by other commercial cleaners, further improving cost to the customer.

"Many green cleaning companies are just using the non-toxic cleaning products," Ms. Snyder says. But Green Leaf is more than that, she says, adding the company uses four-level filtration HEPA filter backpack vacuums.

"Our main objective is to clean for health, and to keep occupants inside an office safe," she says. "The air inside your home, office or work space is five to 10 times more dangerous than the outside air... We aim to reduce allergies, viruses and VOCs (volatile organic compounds, which some traditional cleaning supplies emit) that are put into the air and circulated inside of a building."

Green Leaf has one full-time and two part-time employees, and several commercial clients from Naples to Fort Myers. The company cleans churches, country clubs, fitness centers, offices buildings and schools. Ms. Snyder and Mr. Brinkman report that networking with the Bonita Springs Area Chamber of Commerce yields results.

Along the way, they've realized that they prefer commercial work over residential, which they did for awhile. Cleaning homes was tougher to schedule and not as predictable, Snyder explains.

The green cleaning couple enjoys evening work. "Having days free and cleaning at night works well for us," Mr. Brinkman says. "This schedule gives us flexibility."

In the wee hours after everyone's clocked out, Green Leaf gets down to business without interruption. ■



DO YOU KNOW?

There are
children in
our
community
who do not
eat
all weekend.

With just \$2 CCMI can
feed a family for a day!

Please make a difference in
our community and donate today!



We need your help... Call 239.332.7687

www.CCMILeeCounty.com

BEING #1 ISN'T
ABOUT US.
IT'S ABOUT YOU.

In a recent survey, Fifth Third Bank placed first in customer satisfaction.* While we appreciate it, we're not satisfied. We're going to keep working hard to help our customers feel secure today as they work to reach their dreams for tomorrow. Stop in any Fifth Third Bank location, visit 53.com or call 239-591-6503 to see what we can do for you. Or better yet, ask one of our customers what we've done for them.



*Fourth quarter, 2008 ACSI results show that Fifth Third Bank tied for first among the largest U.S. banks measured for customer satisfaction. Fifth Third Bank, Member FDIC. Equal Housing Lender.