

SIUE Collegiate Entrepreneurs announce “TheOther40” winners

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EDWARDSVILLE - A team of **Southern Illinois University Edwardsville industrial engineering students** led by senior Mert Gover captured first place in SIUE’s “**TheOther40**” Business Plan Competition for 2016. The Entrepreneurs’ Club of SIUE hosted the competition for the sixth year and held its final pitch event Monday, April 11 at the SIUE Morris University Center.

“TheOther40” Business Plan Competition offers SIUE students an opportunity to take their business ideas through the stages needed to launch a product or service. Participants have access to business resources and develop entrepreneurial skills during the four-month process. TheOther40 derives its name from data that shows approximately 60 percent of startups fail within five years. The goal of the program is to find, engage and support “the other 40” percent.

More than \$10,000 in cash prizes and in-kind support were awarded to this year’s finalists. Gover and his teammates received \$5,000 as the first-place winner. The team included seniors Ozan Eryilmaz, Ezgi Aras, Deniz Ersan and Mervener Eralp.

The winning team’s business concept is +Perception. Its first product is +Cane, a “smart” cane for the visually impaired. The +Cane’s competitive advantage is that it incorporates smart technologies into the traditional white cane, including a 911 help button and Bluetooth connectivity to the user’s smartphone.

A +Cane user would have one-touch access with a voice command system for navigation and determining exact location. These capabilities help visually impaired users accomplish daily tasks with great ease, safety and security. +Perception plans to use its contest winnings to produce working prototypes and begin marketing efforts to the visually impaired community.

John Navin, PhD and dean of the SIUE School of Business, said the annual business competition provides a unique experience for students who think creatively and have the drive to fully cultivate a business idea into a workable plan.

“The lessons learned from competing in TheOther40 will have long-term benefits for the participants,” Navin said. “Taking ownership of an idea and being able to effectively pitch the concept is a useful skill in both the corporate world and the fast-paced environment of entrepreneurialism.”

The Other40 Business Plan Competition was administered by the Illinois Small Business Development Center at SIUE. SBDC Director Patrick McKeehan also serves as faculty advisor for the Entrepreneurs’ Club. McKeehan and his staff helped promote the competition on campus, operated the on-line entry system and coordinated all of the participant communications. He was pleased with the outcome.

“My staff and I put a significant amount of time and effort into this competition each year,” said McKeehan. “But it pales in comparison to the number of sacrifices the participants make to compete, while enrolled full-time and dealing with many other work /life obligations. I admire their dedication. Seeing the results makes it worth our efforts.”

Two runners-up, Elliander Eldridge, of Dry Street Gardens, and Brejani Owens, of Kingdom Adventure Center, were each awarded \$2,500.

Eldridge's start-up produces Spirulina, a consumable cyanobacterium that provides humans an enriched source of protein with a high concentration of nutrients, especially in its raw or "fresh" form. Eldridge, an SIUE biological sciences student, intends to use his prize money to triple current production by purchasing five large growing containers.

Owens' business concept is Kingdom Adventure Center. KAC is a full-service daycare located in Collinsville that caters to single parents in the Metro East region. The center provides three meals per day, extended drop-off and pick-up hours and alternative programming for children ages four through 12. Owens plans to use her prize money to expand KAC operations, hire more staff and reduce the daycare's growing waiting list.

Remaining TheOther40 finalists included Joseph Schuit (Design WithUs); Douglas Peterson (EH | DP Studios LLC); Jac'quelene Greene (Pretty Girl's Shimmer) and a second team of industrial engineering students led by Mert Can Elkaya (Smartering Life).

Local Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Desiree Bennyhoff, SIUE alumnus and serial entrepreneur Aaron Broyles, and Mallord Hubbard with City of Highland's Entrepreneurship Program served as the panel of judges.

The on-campus business plan competition is supported in part by an entrepreneurship education initiative gift from the Martinson Foundation to the SIUE School of Business.

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