

8 teams to show innovative plans in startup contest

By Vic Kolenc / El Paso Times

Posted: 03/04/2010 12:00:00 AM MST



Michael Everett, CEO of EvoAir, showed the instrument panel on... (Rudy Gutierrez / El Paso Times)

EL PASO -- Eight teams from five universities, including the University of Texas at El Paso, will try to convince judges that they have the best innovative plan for a startup business at the second Camino Real Venture Competition Friday and Saturday at UTEP.

The winning team will get \$5,000 in cash, \$26,000 worth of business assistance, and entry in Global Moot Corp., in Austin, known as the Super Bowl of business plan competition.

Larry Peterson, one of the co-founders of the Camino Real Angels, an El Paso group that invests in startup companies, and an organizer of the venture competition, said the competition has two emphases. It is intended to give students opportunities to present business plans to experts, as well as to provide economic development for the Camino Real corridor, from El Paso to Colorado.

"The majority (of the competitors) expect to attempt to put a business together. It's not just for people to compete in an academic enterprise," Peterson said.

Michael Everett, 30, a graduate mechanical engineering student at UTEP, is in the competition for the second time with a more extensive business plan. He and partner Mario Ruiz, another UTEP graduate engineering student, have formed Evolved Aircraft Systems, or EvoAir, to develop and sell high-tech devices for small airplanes, including corporate jets.

"Based on the assistance from last year, this is a fantastic opportunity for anyone trying to start a company with limited business training," Everett said.

EvoAir is developing an automatic trim system, an intelligent lighting system and an electronic stabilization system for small aircraft. Everett says he plans to form a company no matter what happens in the competition.

Aaron Martinez, 23, an industrial engineering student at UTEP, hopes the competition helps improve the business plan for Cycling Journey, a bicycle shop at 6762 Edgemere in East El Paso. He opened the shop in November with fellow UTEP engineering student Laura Lopez and another partner.

"We were developing a business plan in an entrepreneurship class," and the teacher encouraged us to enter the competition, Martinez said.

The shop organizes bicycle rides in different areas of El Paso as a way to get people interested in bicycling.

"We're trying to build a biking culture here," Martinez said.

Peterson, of the Camino Real Angels, said teams in the competition need to present an innovative product or an innovative business model.

Last year's winner, PowerMundo, from Colorado State University, was a "business model innovator," he said.

PowerMundo (www.powermundo.com), a social venture to deliver technology to the developing world, continues to operate as a business. It did well in the Austin competition, but was not a finalist.

Two Mexican teams in last year's competition formed businesses, said Nancy Lowery, technical coordinator at the Bi-National Sustainability Lab in Santa Teresa, another of the competition's organizers. The UTEP College of Business Administration is the other organizer.

Grupo Empresarial Grisol, from Tecnológico de Monterrey, Chihuahua campus, last year's runner-up, is operating a business in Chihuahua City to produce and sell tofu, Lowery said. And D-Mint, from Universidad TecMilenio in Juárez, set up a business to sell its mint-flavored bottled water, she said.

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More information: <http://caminorealcompetition.org>

Venture teams

Teams competing in second Camino Real Venture Competition on Friday and Saturday at UTEP's College of Business Administration:

- Evolved Aircraft Systems (EvoAir), UTEP: High-tech components for small aircraft.
- Cycling Journey, UTEP: El Paso bicycle store.
- AYZH Inc., Colorado State University: Technology solutions for rural women.
- Thin Air Nitrogen Solutions, Colorado State University: Affordable, organic fertilizers for small farmers.
- iTask, United States Air Force Academy: Internet service to connect people to perform everyday tasks.
- Mimic Tracking Systems, University of New Mexico: Technology startup based on Umbra, a real-time tracking device.
- Santa Fe Health Software, University of New Mexico: Electronic medical records for rural medical offices.
- Natura Mix, Tecnológico de Monterrey, Chihuahua campus: Fast-food restaurant for healthful foods with "green roofs."