

12 College Teams Will Pitch Business Ideas to Reach "Super Bowl" of Business Plans

By Vic Kolenc / El Paso Times

March 1, 2009 --EL PASO -- Some El Paso leaders and educators hope a venture competition for college students from Colorado to Chihuahua City, Mexico, will do for El Paso what venture competitions have done for Austin and other communities.

"Hundreds of communities around the world are using these contests" to breed high-tech startups, said El Paso businessman Larry Peterson, a co-founder of the Camino Real Angels, an El Paso group that invests in startup companies, and chairman of the mayor's economic advisory council.

Contest details

- ▶ **Camino Real Venture Competition** will begin Thursday with a public reception and 60-Second Elevator Pitch Contest at the Hilton Garden Inn, 111 W. University, on the UTEP campus, 5:30 to 8 p.m.
- ▶ **Teams will present business plans** to judges, who include business experts and investors, Friday at the UTEP College of Business Administration.
- ▶ **Four finalists will compete in the final round Saturday morning.** Winner and runner-up will be named at a luncheon. The sessions are not open to the public.
- ▶ **More information:** <http://caminoreal-competition.org>; www.mootcorp.org



The Camino Real Research Corridor

Those groups instigated the idea for the Camino Real Venture Competition, which will have its inaugural contest Thursday through Saturday at the University of Texas at El Paso College of Business Administration and at the El Paso Garden Hilton at UTEP.

UTEP, the Bi-National Sustainability Lab in Santa Teresa, and the Camino Real Angels developed the new contest.

Twelve teams from New Mexico, Colorado, Mexico and UTEP will compete for \$49,000 in cash and prizes. The winner gets \$10,000, and a year of incubation at the Bi-National lab. It also gets to compete in Global Moot Corp., in Austin, known as the Super Bowl of business plan competition.

Eco-Oil Unlimited

Marisol Romero, 26, who in May will get a master's degree in chemistry at UTEP, said she wasn't thinking about starting a business until she got involved in the venture competition.

"I'm always open to opportunities," said Romero, who has a bachelor's degree in microbiology from a Chihuahua City university. "That's why I'm in the competition -- to get money" to start Eco-Oil Unlimited, she said.

Eco-Oil, which won a UTEP business class competition, would grow algae and use a technology developed at UTEP to extract oil from algae in a cost-effective way. The oil would be sold to companies to produce biofuels, and the algae waste would be sold to make fertilizer and other products, Romero said.



Alonzo **Romero**

Eco-Oil

- ▶ Karla Alonzo, Marisol Romero and Daniel Miranda are on a UTEP team that wants to take an algae oil-extraction technology developed at UTEP to sell algae oil for biofuel and algae waste for other products.



Miranda

"Biofuels is a great industry that's just starting," Romero said. "I think there's a big future for algae for biofuel."

Launching pad

Gary Cadenhead, former Moot Corp. director, said dozens of companies have been launched from the 26-year-old Texas Moot Corp. competition for teams from the University of Texas at Austin, and from the Global Moot Corp. competition for university teams from around the world, also at UT Austin. Cadenhead is a consultant for the Camino Real Venture Competition, one of 21 competitions from around the world sending winners to Global Moot Corp., in May.

The competition was conceived by two UT Austin MBA students who "were looking for an experience for MBAs similar to what their (law student) friends were experiencing in moot court," he said.

"For the first five years, it (Moot Corp. competition) was really moot. It was an intellectual enterprise. None (of the competitors) tried to launch a business," Cadenhead said. "In the last 10 years, (many) teams competing in Austin have launched and gotten venture capital funding. So, it's no longer moot When you get teams together and investors together, a lot of times what you thought was an exercise to learn skills becomes a real venture."



New Aerospace

Michael Everett, 29, who in May will get a master's degree in mechanical engineering at UTEP, said his company idea, New Aerospace, is already in the works and will go forward no matter what happens with the competition.

"This is a huge opportunity to see how people respond to our technology," Everett said.

He and his father, Louis Everett, chairman of the UTEP Department of Mechanical Engineering, developed an electronic stabilization system to keep small aircraft stable when landing or at other times when a small aircraft's wheels are rolling on the ground. Everett plans to incorporate his company soon and already has other aviation devices planned, he said.

Everett didn't have experience writing a business plan, so he received some coaching from Frank Hoy, director of UTEP's entrepreneurial centers.

"This is not just pie in the sky," Hoy said. "Students can really design an innovative business and pitch it to someone," including some investors who will serve as judges. "There's a chance here to put yourself on the world map, and an opportunity for the community at large where these competitions are held. These competitions in other cities have really worked."

Silver Nano Systems

Francisca "Frances" Reyes, 32, who is working on dual master's degrees in business administration and public administration at UTEP, said the feedback that a business plan will receive through the competition "will be priceless."

Reyes, who has a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering from a university in Durango, Mexico, said she wants to use research done at UTEP on how silver nanoparticles kill bacteria and have other environmentally friendly cleaning-agent attributes to create Silver Nano Systems. The company would produce commercial and industrial cleaning products containing silver nanoparticles, she said.

"If I don't win, I'd look at (entering) other business plan competitions," Reyes said. "I'd like this to become a business."

Ron Munden, co-chairman of the Camino Real Angels, said he hopes the competition helps show students "there is an opportunity to create their own business -- they don't have to move away."

Other teams, and their business ideas, in the Camino Real Venture Competition:

--**New Mexico State: A Flock o' Ducks**, user-friendly layout generator tool for MySpace and other social networks.

--**University of New Mexico: Algal Products**, producer of biofuel, omega oil and animal feed products.

--**University of New Mexico: MicroHound**, hand-held system to detect trace amounts of explosives.

--**Colorado State University: PowerMundo**, network of sustainable resources for poor people with a worldwide distribution network for appropriate technology products.

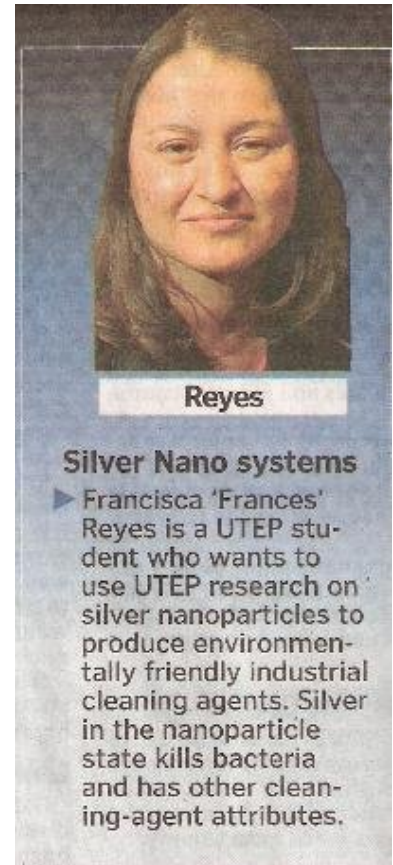
--**Universidad TecMilenio, Juarez campus: D-Mint**, bottled water flavored with natural mint.

--**Universidad Autonoma de Ciudad Juarez: Complejo Departamental**, acquires real estate and builds affordable housing for maquiladora workers.

--**Universidad Autonoma de Chihuahua: Biochihuagas**, produces biogas from organic waste.

--**Universidad Autonoma de Chihuahua: Comercialzadora Reny**, provides logistics and technologies to improve manufacturing production and link Mexican producers to international markets.

--**Tecnologico de Monterrey, Chihuahua campus: Grupo Empresarial Grisol**, offers natural products from Chihuahua and promotes tofu. Source: Camino Real Venture Competition.



Vic Kolenc may be reached at vkolenc@elpasotimes.com, 546-6421