

Trade show showcases young entrepreneurs

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

Describing their product as bottled water with attitude, Brian Mills and Ryan Mulholland formed Wild Rapids earlier this year in hopes of tapping into a billion-dollar industry.

The timing is good for the pair of budding entrepreneurs, especially considering the anxiety rampant in Ontario concerning tap water — highlighted by the recent tragic events of Walkerton's contaminated water supply.

Working with a Newmarket supplier, the firm's co-presidents plan to approach grocery stores across greater Toronto in hopes of supplying their product in vendor machines outside outlets, where bottles of the water would be sold for \$1 apiece, at least 75 cents cheaper than most competitors.

"We could make more money on the volume, instead of worrying about the price of an individual bottle," says Mulholland. "We want to supply an attitude with our water, where people at hockey arenas, baseball parks and gymnasiums can enjoy our product."

Sounds like a winning formula, doesn't it? Mills and Mulholland are Grade 12 students at Aurora's Cardinal Carter Catholic high school, and formed their company and wrote a business plan as part of their entrepreneurial business course.

And although the budding executives may indeed discover the merits of the business venture later this spring, they displayed their business savvy at the school's first annual trade show last Thursday, where investors were allotted \$20,000 in play money to invest in any of 16 new firms.

"Today's youth, the people we have talked with, are drinking water like mad, and I think we can make money at this during the summer," added Mulholland.

Business teachers Sergio Bertolo and Yolanda Caruso organized the trade show to offer their students some valuable experi-



Nina Pizzuro (foreground) and Jennelle Jaggernauth are the N and J in NJ's Unique Designs.

ence in the corporate world, far removed from the textbooks and exams of the classroom.

And the lessons learned from the course will certainly help many of the students

down the road, considering recent statistics show nearly 60 per cent of Canadians will operate a self-employed enterprise.

"Teaching out of the textbook is good, but just learning from that textbook is not

enough. High school business courses should be a mandatory part of the curriculum," stressed Caruso, herself a former operator of two businesses. "Learning to sell their ideas to investors is critical because you need that money for the business, whether it's from your parents or a venture capitalist."

Oak Ridges resident Humberto Simao, who operates a legal consulting business in Toronto, was impressed with many of the students' ideas, which ranged from BaseBeat, a clothing and cafe store, an online marketing research company called DC2 and the Hall of Fame sports bar.

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There was also the Silver Bullit Arcade, NJ's Unique Designs offering flower baskets and Club Cougar, a Toronto night club where student operators Alanna Whittington, Marcel Seereeram and Matthew Masciangelo would turn 8,000 square feet of leased space into a popular dance hall, using the DJs in need of work thanks to the city's ban on rave parties.

"These are unique concepts and ideas, ideas that have not been used before. It's not just the same old pizza joint," pointed out Simao. "They have a catch to it, and their timing is good."

"It's obvious their business course has really given the students the insight into what steps to take to form a new company. And even if they don't actually go into business right now, they have learned valuable lessons. I wish, at this age, I was exposed to something like this instead of just studying math and history."

Exhibit helps businesses discover export opportunities

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

With export opportunities abundant for York Region businesses, navigating the complicated maze is often the only stumbling block barring firms from achieving success.

However, an excess of easily available information can lead to knowledge overload for company executives searching out new avenues to peddle their goods and services, especially in the profit-rich economies of the United States, European and Asian markets.

But a partnership effort between York Region's economic development office and Human Resources Development Canada helped curious representatives from small and medium-sized companies unearth answers during yesterday's inaugural Export Day.

Exhibitors representing 21 government agencies and business institutions were on

hand at Seneca College's King campus to offer expert knowledge and experience in logistics, U.S. Customs, immigration, international banking and trade financing.

And participants received background data through three workshop sessions highlighting the ins-and-outs of international finance, law and freight transport.

"Companies need a bit of confidence working their way through this because there is no shortage of information when you are looking for export advice," York Region economic development director, Don Eastwood explained before the event kicked off early yesterday.

"In fact, there is almost too much information from a bewildering amount of resources. We wanted to give people some hands-on practical exposure with people who can provide the resources they need. You can literally spend days on the Internet accessing infor-

mation relating to exporting, but companies need to identify, very quickly, the specific needs for their business.

"They need to zero in on who can help them," he added.

Although the trade show offered a good cross-section of exhibitors and intrigued business personnel, an executive with Tower Group International Canada Inc. says the freight exporter message remains the same whether he and his colleagues are discussing new business with experienced firms or a company entering the exporting scene for the first time.

"We wouldn't tell participants here anything different than a veteran exporter. A person selling cookies or trees overseas has to know what steps to take, just the same as someone we have been dealing with since the early 1990s," points out Lynn Wark, a surface transportation manager with Tower Group, a

company recently purchased by Federal Express Inc.

"That's where you build your relationships."

In January, Eastwood's economic development department launched its export program initiative, a free service to help local companies discover a world of opportunities by tapping the global market.

Three veteran export advisers are educating firms on gaining a foothold in a market that supports more than 1.6 million Ontario jobs and brings in \$190 billion each year.

And export sales create jobs. For every \$1 billion of export sales, nearly 11,000 jobs are created for Canadians.

For more information about York Region's export initiative, contact the program hotline at (905) 830-4444, ext. 1554, or by e-mail at export@region.york.on.ca

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