

Students' marketing strategy pays off

By Tiffany Woods
For the Oregon Daily Emerald

Tim Robertson was getting frustrated. After spending a day at the mall, he couldn't find any unique Christmas gifts.

So he created his own.

Six months later and \$1,500 richer, Robertson is on to something good.

At least four judges at a recent business plan competition think so.

Robertson, a master's student in business, and his business partner, Jeanine Luteijn, a marketing and management major, entered a business plan for their product in the April 17 New Venture Competition and won first place, taking home \$1,500, a plaque and big plans for the future.

Their product, which Robertson says fills a gap in the market, is a simple yet elegantly designed wooden block game called "Tower Strategy," developed by their company, the Wood Company. Players stack the blocks as high as possible until the tower crashes to the ground. The unique part of the game is that each block is made out of an exotic piece of wood from various countries worldwide.

Their business plan was one of four entries in the competition, which was at the University's Lundquist Center for Business Development. Colleges and universities in Oregon, Washington and Idaho entered business plans in the competition that were then judged by representatives from the academic and business communities.

Judges included Wayne Embree, deputy director of the Oregon Resource and Technology Development Corporation; Carl Flipper, executive director of Oregon Enterprise Forum; Mike Francis, a business columnist for *The Oregonian*; and Lynn Stevenson, director of the University Technology Transfer Office.

Judging was based on the long-term sales and profit potential of the business, the likelihood of the business' success, and the quality of the presentation and analysis.

Robertson and Luteijn's presentation summed up more than 700 hours of research in 20 minutes and was followed by a 20-minute question-and-answer ses-

sion. Their presentation addressed the selling, distribution and user benefits of their product and also explained the balance sheet, income and cash-flow statements in their business plan.

Karlin Conklin, director of the Lundquist Center, which also helped organize the competition, said the presentation was the pair's strongest asset.

"The judges were impressed by their presentation and Tim's ability to answer questions under fire," she said. "Presentation and being able to be persuasive and to think under fire and defend your idea is half of the game."

Robertson and Luteijn's success at the New Venture Competition has quelled some of the initial anxiety that they had about their product's success in the market. They said the competition gave them hope and was a good way to showcase their talents.

"This adds tremendous credibility to both Jeanine's and my talent and to our ability to perform," he said. "It adds credibility to our knowledge and the fact that we had support from the business school. This will have a positive effect on whatever Jeanine and I decide to do."

Conklin agreed but added that their success will depend on their marketing skills.

"If they are excellent marketers, then this company has the potential to be a successful business in the game industry, but it hinges on their skill in marketing," she said. "They have so much passion and are willing to work hard to open the doors to the market, but success will depend on how fast they move and on the next product they bring in."

Robertson and Luteijn recognize this and are already making plans for the future. They intend to finish the informational booklet about the game, give presentations to interested buyers and market the game with the Nature Company, Made in Oregon, Natural Wonders and possibly Nordstrom. In addition, they will use \$50,000 from investors to finance the start-up of their company.

The two also plan to expand the market for the game by creating two other versions of the game. In addition to the original "Tower Strategy," which includes 15



Photo by Anthony Forney
University students Tim Robertson and Jeanine Luteijn have successfully marketed "Tower Strategy," which they hope will be in stores by Christmas.

different types of wood and sells for \$45, they will market the "Tower Strategy Sampler" with 45 types of wood, and the "Tower Strategy Connoisseur," which uses wood that is selected by the consumer.

Robertson and Luteijn also hope to develop an institutional market for their game. They say the game functions as an educational tool because it teaches geography by describing the various countries from which the wood comes.

"We will provide a booklet that has a picture of the wood, its name, where it comes from, and its uses so that children can play the game and in the meantime, learn about the world," Luteijn said.

The two entrepreneurs are excited about their product's future. If everything goes as planned, their game will be on the market in time for Christmas. If so, then shoppers looking for unique gifts will not experience the same dilemma that Robertson faced last year.

CELEBRATION

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ing Latin American cuisine, including horchata, a drink consisting of rice, sugar and water.

As part of its observance of Cinco de Mayo, the group also presented a free slide show Monday evening by Daniel Osuna, international secretary and representative of El Partido Nacional de La Raza Unida.

The group is attempting to educate the public about the true meaning of Cinco de Mayo because commercialization and the media has distorted many people's view about the day, which was originally designated to recognize the Battle of Puebla, Rodriguez said.

"Cinco de Mayo is a cause for celebration but it's also a good opportunity to educate the people," said James McNicholas, MEChA Board of Directors member.

MEChA will also celebrate Cinco de Mayo this weekend by participating in the Oregon Statewide Chicano/a Student Conference at the Monarch Hotel in Portland. The general public is invited to attend the conference, opening Friday at 5 p.m., that will focus on Chicano history and culture.

For the second consecutive year, Adelante Si Hispanic Organization will celebrate the Latin American holiday Saturday with Fiesta Latina. The free event attracted more than 5,000 people last year and this year is expected to attract a crowd of about 10,000, said Joe Rivera, president of the hispanic group.

The purpose of Fiesta Latina, Rivera said, is to join people together. He said his group hopes to build strong foundations with the community.

"I don't believe in building bridges because bridges collapse and there's no foundation," he said.

This year's event is scheduled to take place under the Washington/Jefferson Street bridge regardless of the weather, Rivera said. The alcohol-free event will feature about 30 Latin American food and craft booths.

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