

# Stetson wins innovation challenge

Second annual competition draws eight teams from area schools



Courtesy of Lisa Yetters

Stetson University students Emma Campbell, left, and David Sawyer give a presentation about their business startup, TSOLife LLC, at the second annual Cairns Foundation Innovation Challenge last week at the UCF Business Incubator at Daytona Beach International Airport. The TSOLife team won the event.

By **CLAYTON PARK**  
clayton.park@news-jmi.com

## DAYTONA BEACH

**A** student team from Stetson University has won the second annual Cairns Foundation Innovation Challenge.

The event, which took place Thursday at the Volusia County-funded UCF Business Incubator at Daytona Beach International Airport, challenged student teams from area colleges and universities to come up with creative ideas with the potential for commercialization.

Approximately 80 people attended the half-day invitation-only event, which saw eight teams compete by pitching their ideas to a panel of judges which included Jim Cairns, executive director of the Cairns Foundation, Rick Fraser, executive director of the Ormond Beach Chamber of Commerce, inventor/entrepreneur Richard Madden and Connie Bernal, site manager for the incubator.

The first place winner of this year's competition was a team made up of Stetson students David Sawyer and Emma Campbell and their faculty adviser, Tara Batista. Batista, Campbell and Sawyer will share a \$10,000 cash prize, donated by the Cairns Foundation, as well as a full year of free business mentoring services and an office space at the incubator.

Their proposed venture, TSOLife LLC, would provide an online platform where users can securely and permanently document their life stories. For a one-time fee the company can securely

store and host the information.

Sawyer said winning the competition was "a pretty big deal. Being a student entrepreneur, for the Cairns Foundation to believe in my idea and give me capital for my business is just a phenomenal opportunity."

Sawyer came up with the concept for TSOLife last year when attending the funeral for one of his grandmothers. "The light bulb moment for me came when I was hearing stories about my grandmother's life and realizing my grandkids would never get to hear those stories," he said.

The Stetson senior, who is majoring in finance and entrepreneurship, proceeded to conduct feasibility research for his proposed venture, enlisting the help of Campbell, a Stetson junior who is majoring in family enterprise and business systems analysis.

Campbell is now the company's president, while Sawyer is the CEO.

The two students also raised \$60,000 in seed money from family and friends, said Sawyer, who added that TSOLife is set to launch its Internet portal later this month.

Batista agreed to become a faculty adviser for Sawyer and Campbell's venture. Batista, who teaches at Stetson, is also the faculty sponsor of Enattus, a national organization that promotes social enterprises.

Second place went to another team from Stetson that includes students Christian Micklisch, John Salis and Nathan Hilliard and a trio of professors, Becky and Gary Oliphant and Daniel

Plante.

Their venture is called Xeres, a general-purpose reservation system that can be adapted to the needs of any business or university. Designed for ease of use, scalability and customization, the system allows users to change how and what they are reserving, and add or remove features as they see fit, according to Bernal.

The second place Xeres team will share a \$5,000 cash prize, donated by the Hunter Foundation, and are also eligible to receive free consulting from incubator staff, Bernal said.

"One of the purposes of the innovation challenge is to get inventions or new technologies to market and to help students become the next \$10 million company in Volusia County," Bernal said. "What I saw (at the competition) was amazing."

The hope is to encourage people with innovative ideas to form successful companies that can lead to the creation of jobs for others, Bernal said, adding, "That's the whole point."

The event included an update report from last year's winner, AquaSolve Ventures LLC, which was founded by a student team from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. The startup, which is now a client of the incubator, has developed a portable water purification system designed for disaster relief, military uses, and outdoor activities.

The other participants in this year's challenge included teams from Daytona State College and Embry-Riddle as well as a third team from Stetson.