

**Economic Fuel Challenge Winners Awarded for Business Plans
By Ashley Bailey, The Eureka Reporter
5/1/08**

Unlike many of her fellow peers looking for their first out-of-college job, Shannon Dawson won't have to look too far.

She has less than two weeks before she graduates from Humboldt State University and she will open her own business — Little Learners Preschool in Arcata — with the help of a \$25,000 grand prize she won from the Economic Fuel Student Business Challenge.

Dawson was one of four student teams that won a grand prize among eight finalists in this year's competition.

Among friends and family at a Wharfinger building reception, she was in high spirits.

"I'm a bit in shock right now — it's been an exciting experience and huge journey," she said, looking over to a co-worker in the crowd. "Don't worry, I'm showing up for work tomorrow!"

Out of 28 teams that submitted plans, it came down to eight teams — many of which comprised of people that had never seen a business plan before, let alone written one, which impressed the judges of the competition.

"Seeing these smiling faces and watching how hard these students have worked is just incredible," said Mike Thomas, director of the Master Business Administration program at HSU. "This is one of the most prestigious business competitions in the U.S. and it says a lot about everybody involved."

Aaron Antrim, another grand prize winner of Economic Fuel, has already started his business locally — Trillium Transit Internet Solutions, which offers online transit information.

He was all smiles and had a bit of advice to offer to prospective entrepreneurs.

"Get out there and do it and plan as you go," he said. "Treat your customers as teachers and sales calls as learning opportunities."

Many of the finalists were thankful to the Humboldt County Small Business Development Center, which offered free services and advice to them to get their business plans in order.

"It's fun to see young people with great ideas take them someplace," said Michael Kraft, executive director of the Humboldt County SBDC.

The second time around was sweeter for Brandon Hemenway, showing that hard work and dedication have paid off.

His business, AlgaRhythms — which manufactures fertilizer from wastewater algae — was one of the four grand prize winners of the competition in his second year of competing.

The best piece of advice he could offer for others looking to start-up a business is to do everything you can to get some real feedback from your customers.

“You get more information from working with your customers, even if you don’t think you’re ready for it,” he said. “Never give up because it’s hard and never stop asking questions.”