

**Economic Fuel Gears up for Third Season**  
**by Courtney Hunt-Munther, The Eureka Reporter**  
**10/1/2007**

In one week, dozens of local entrepreneurs will gather at the Wharfinger Building in Eureka to gather advice from the people they eventually hope to be — grand-prize winners of Economic Fuel: the Humboldt County Student Business Challenge.

The competition launch is scheduled from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Oct. 9, and will feature some of the winners and runners-up from last year's competition.

The teams will present their winning business ideas and offer to entrepreneurs tips about what helped them make it to the top of last year's competition. Entrepreneurs thinking about entering the contest will also be able to pick up registration packets and pose questions to Economic Fuel coordinators.

Sponsored by The Eureka Reporter, Economic Fuel is designed to promote economic growth on the North Coast through supporting local entrepreneurs.

In its third year, the competition pits local entrepreneurs against each other in a contest to see who can come up with the best business plan. Participants must be current students or recent graduates of either Humboldt State University or College of the Redwoods, and must intend for their business to be located within Humboldt County.

Economic Fuel awards four teams with the best business plans \$25,000 cash prizes to be used as seed capital for their venture. One runner-up receives \$10,000, a second runner-up receives \$5,000 and two honorable mention prizes of \$1,000 are given.

Judges evaluate the plans based on a number of criteria, including the overall viability of the idea, the team's potential to successfully start and grow the business, and the quality of the written business plan.

Business plans are judged on how effectively the teams define the industry, target market and existing competition; identify the business' social impact and financial assumptions; and how well they develop their business's marketing plan and spending plan for the \$25,000 prize.

Finalist teams present their plans to a panel of judges who evaluate the content and quality of the teams' speeches, with an emphasis on whether team members effectively "sold" the business idea and responded appropriately to any questions posed.

Four teams took home top prizes at the awards ceremony on May 3: Kalindi Rogers and Erin Slattery of the mobile sushi eatery Agogo; Jason Buck and Jamie Ford of TrenchScan geologic photography service; Sarah Brunner and Shail Pec-Crouse of Wild Chick Farm; and Inga Denney and Jacob Hansen of Innovative Medical Workshops.

Jim Rose, who proposed California Native American Petroleum, won \$10,000 as first runner-up, followed by David Stone and Dan Hunter of North Coast Solar, who won \$5,000 as second runner-up.

Two \$1,000 honorable mention prizes were awarded to Gregory and Samantha Hufford of Redwood Outfitters and to Patrick Wiley and Brandon Hemenway of AlgaRhythms. Both teams earning honorable mention will be eligible to submit business plans in next year's competition.

At the Oct. 9 launch, teams Agogo, North Coast Solar, Wild Chick Farm and TrenchScan will make presentations and answer questions posed by the audience.

Grand-prize winners Brunner and Pec-Crouse plan to speak about how winning Economic Fuel will enable them to grow their business faster. The pair entered Economic Fuel in 2005 — the first year it was offered — and decided to open Wild Chick Farm even though they weren't chosen as finalists.

After winning one of the \$25,000 grand-prize awards last spring, Brunner and Pec-Crouse plan to purchase a mobile processing unit, or MPU, that can travel to different places. They need the unit to become state certified, and having the certification will enable them to sell to restaurants who they say are "clamoring" for their chicken products.

"It's provided that capital investment that we needed to build an MPU in a short amount of time," Brunner said of Economic Fuel. "Our biggest barrier to building our business is not being state certified. There's a whole other set of customers we could sell to if we get that."

Hunter and Stone, who proposed a solar installation business called North Coast Solar, will also present during the Economic Fuel launch,

but will focus on the lessons they learned as participants in last year's competition.

"Being able to sit down and take a concept that I really liked from start to finish was great," Hunter said.

Stone, who is majoring in business at HSU, credited HSU professor Nancy Vizenor and CR professor Chris Gaines' entrepreneurship class last spring with giving them the tools they needed to write a winning business plan. Many of the things he and Hunter learned in the class are now popping up in other business courses, he said.

Because both are still in school, Hunter and Stone have put their business on hiatus until they can devote all their energy and time to it.