

**Economic Fuel: Entrepreneurs Forum Scheduled for Tonight  
by Courtney Hunt-Munther, The Eureka Reporter  
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Economic Fuel: The Humboldt County Student Business Challenge is gearing up for its 2008 competition by providing potential competitors with an opportunity to learn from successful entrepreneurs.

Five entrepreneurs who have successfully started and built ventures in Humboldt County will speak about their businesses and answer questions at Economic Fuel's first Entrepreneurs Forum of the season tonight. The event begins at 6:30 p.m. at the Kate Buchanan Room at Humboldt State University and the community is invited to attend.

Economic Fuel coordinators Kathy Miller and Elizabeth Chapman selected panelists with a wide range of experience for the event in an effort to appeal to all entrepreneurs. At the event tonight, panelists will represent industries like retail, finance and real estate, construction and development, outdoor activities and technology.

Included on the panel: Melinda Myers, owner of Good Relations in Eureka; Tim Lorenzo, owner of RCI Mortgage/Lorenzo Properties; Dan Johnson, owner of The DANCO Group, Marc Rowley, owner of Bigfoot Rafting Co., and Jonathan Speaker, COO of StreamGuys.

Speaker, an outspoken advocate of a redundant broadband Internet connection on the North Coast, said he intends to discuss two things he believes are critical for entrepreneurs building businesses in Humboldt County: finding qualified employees and being resilient.

The former half of that equation is one of the most challenging parts about being in business locally, Speaker said. He and other founding members of StreamGuys have struggled in the past to find individuals qualified to do the type of work they need.

Secondly, Speaker believes it essential for new entrepreneurs to be resilient, to find the strength to persevere and face head-on the hurdles of operating in a rural community.

He founded his company, StreamGuys, with friend and fellow technology enthusiast Kiriki Delany in 2000 after having opened and closed a couple of businesses. Today, StreamGuys streams media for

major companies around the world, including Pfizer Pharmaceutical Co. and Cisco.

"Anything's possible," Speaker said. "You can create any kind of business in this county. It's just that you need to be resilient and you need to have the right people." Entrepreneurship, he added, "is critical for a resource-based economy."

Another industry that will be represented at tonight's forum is the retail sector. Melinda Myers opened her business, Good Relations, in 1995 after operating a home-based pleasure party company for more than a decade.

For Myers, the biggest obstacle to operating a retail business on the North Coast is the expense of getting products to market and the length of time it takes to get shipments in from out of the area.

"I think that the main point is no matter what business or what industry, it's important to know what the keys are in that industry," Myers said. For retail, pricing, product and promotion are the three key ideas she said are essential.

Additionally, "you have to know your market really, really well," she said.

Myers, who is also working on becoming a clinical psychologist, opened Good Relations with a \$1,500 line of credit and, after quickly paying back the loan, has since operated the business debt-free. Writing a solid business plan before opening a retail store made the difference between profitability and bankruptcy, she said.

Myers said she also intends to touch on the importance of researching an industry before jumping in headfirst and maintaining a balance between optimism and caution when opening a business.