

Eureka Southwest Rotary Club Offers Free Membership for Economic Fuel Finalist
by Courtney Hunt-Munther, The Eureka Reporter
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One finalist from the eight teams selected to win cash prizes in the Economic Fuel student business competition will have an opportunity to be a member of the Rotary Club of Southwest Eureka for one year — free of charge.

The club decided to grant an entrepreneur from the competition a year-long membership in an effort to attract young professionals to the organization, as well as inspire them to serve the community.

Eureka Southwest Rotary member Chuck Smith said the reasoning behind this decision was the club's belief that a part of any business is community involvement.

"It is a way to get into the community, to meet the people who are the movers and shakers in the community and interact with them on a business level," Smith said.

Through community service, Rotary members work to promote peace and understanding, and provide support for the needs of communities.

According to the organization's Web site, www.rotary.org, Rotary strives to create a club filled with businessmen and businesswomen from a variety of different fields for networking purposes, to develop leadership skills and to effect change throughout the community through local business leaders.

One of the difficulties the club faces in recruiting young professionals is the time commitment involved. According to Smith, Rotary expects members to be at the meetings 100 percent of the time. But often, young entrepreneurs, business owners and business professionals cannot commit that much time to an organization because of how immersed they are in running their business or beginning a career.

The fact that members are required to pay an annual membership fee and are fined as part of a way to support the organization doesn't help, which is why Eureka Southwest Rotary wanted to give one of the Economic Fuel finalists the opportunity to join the club for free for a year.

"It's hard to make that commitment," Smith said.

Still, there are significant advantages to be gained, if not just the knowledge that one is helping make the world a better place. For entrepreneurs just beginning their businesses, Rotary provides a forum in which they can meet other business professionals.

Economic Fuel coordinator Kathy Miller said previous winners of the competition have made invaluable contacts with community residents through Rotary.

Economic Fuel 2006 second runner-up Ciaran McCarthy, for instance, attended one of Mad River Rotary's meetings earlier this year and met a retired tissue culturist from Simpson Timber Co. This contact was particularly beneficial for McCarthy, whose business idea centers on the micropropagation of plant tissue.

Also through Rotary, Chris Kieselhorst, co-owner of Ironside Metalworks, a business specializing in cast iron work, met a person with experience in his field.

"It's such a great opportunity for someone," Miller said.

The Rotary Club of Southwest Eureka meets Fridays from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the Red Lion Hotel in Eureka. The Economic Fuel finalist membership would begin July 1, 2007, and extend until June 30, 2008. Finalists are asked to respond to the letter sent to them by May 14 if they're interested. For more information about the club, visit www.swrotary.org.