



College programs hope to spark new businesses

MATTHEW DANEMAN • STAFF WRITER • APRIL 28, 2009

With years of education and experience under their belts, David I. Lewis and Teheran K. Simmons know information technology backwards and forwards.

What the two don't know as much about is how to turn that expertise into signed contracts with their Henrietta-based virtual training and education startup company TecqueLabs.

"We think of how to solve problems, not necessarily how to translate that into dollars," said Lewis, the company co-founder and CEO. "We still talk too technically."

But the company — which is targeting small and mid-sized businesses for its IT consulting work — is in the midst of signing one customer and meets later this week with a prospect.

Lewis and Simmons are among a growing crowd of area entrepreneurs getting classroom help for their business aspirations. TecqueLabs was among more than a dozen young or starting-out businesses on display Monday at Monroe Community College's Brighton campus as part of the school's new Emerging Entrepreneurs Scholarship Program.

The program, which started this academic year at MCC, is part of an increasing push in local higher education to make entrepreneurship part of the curriculum.

Genesee Community College this year started a similar scholarship program, which has the U.S. Labor Department providing scholarship money to prospective entrepreneurs taking training courses.

Rochester Institute of Technology in 2007 started its Simone Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, which offers a variety of courses and programs on starting a business.

And University of Rochester in 2003 received a \$3.5 million grant from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation as part of \$25 million going to eight universities expanding their entrepreneurship education. UR has since started its Center for Entrepreneurship.

"We want to encourage entrepreneurship as a vehicle for economic development," said Sherry Tshibangu, assistant professor of business administration and director of MCC's Emerging Entrepreneurs Scholarship Program.

The MCC program had 155 applicants for 30 seats in the fall 2008 session, Tshibangu said, and 115 applications for 45 seats in the spring. The MCC program has received Labor Department money to continue offering scholarships for summer and fall 2009 sessions, she said.

"Entrepreneurship is probably one of the main ways we're going to get out of the doldrums of our economy," said Lewis, 36, of Rochester.

Barbara A Furstoss, who started Shooting Star Hope & Healing Center out of her Chili home about two years ago, signed up for the MCC program to try to jumpstart the sluggish business, which makes gift baskets specifically for people going through some personal loss, such as a death in the family.

"Not all good ideas work," she said. "I'm hoping this one does."

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Luis Gracia, of Rochester, left, talks about organic ingredients with Biscotti for Everybotti co-owner Grace Ana Ravines of Brighton during the Emerging Entrepreneurship expo at MCC in Brighton Monday afternoon. (KRIS J. MURANTE staff photographer)



Michael Ornt of Chili, left, and Shera Malcolm of Rochester look at sample resumes. (KRIS J. MURANTE staff photographer)