

# Business

PHONE: 550-7908 | E-MAIL: sports@vernonmorningstar.com

## Students thrive in Dragon's Den

*Young entrepreneurs pitch business ideas for cash prizes.*

GRAEME CORBETT

Morning Star Staff

Local high school students are proving good business sense isn't limited to just adults.

Now in its second year, the Dragon's Den, a local high school version of the popular Canadian television program, is giving students a chance to show off their entrepreneurial flare.

After weeks of researching business ideas, student teams presented their plans to a local panel of business savvy judges at the Kalamalka campus of Okanagan College. It was the second of three tasks for the competition, and to get that far, students first had to impress judges enough with their initial business idea in task one.

While they might not be as ruthless as their television counterparts, the judges are required to whittle down the contestants so that just four teams remain in each category (seniors and juniors).

"It's great to see in schools that entrepreneurship is being presented as a career option," said Claudette Everitt, a panel judge who has operated her own consulting company, Everitt Consulting, since 1990.

"It's really encouraging to see the teachers and the schools assisting. And the college students in the business program are sharing what they've learned, so there's that mentoring process.

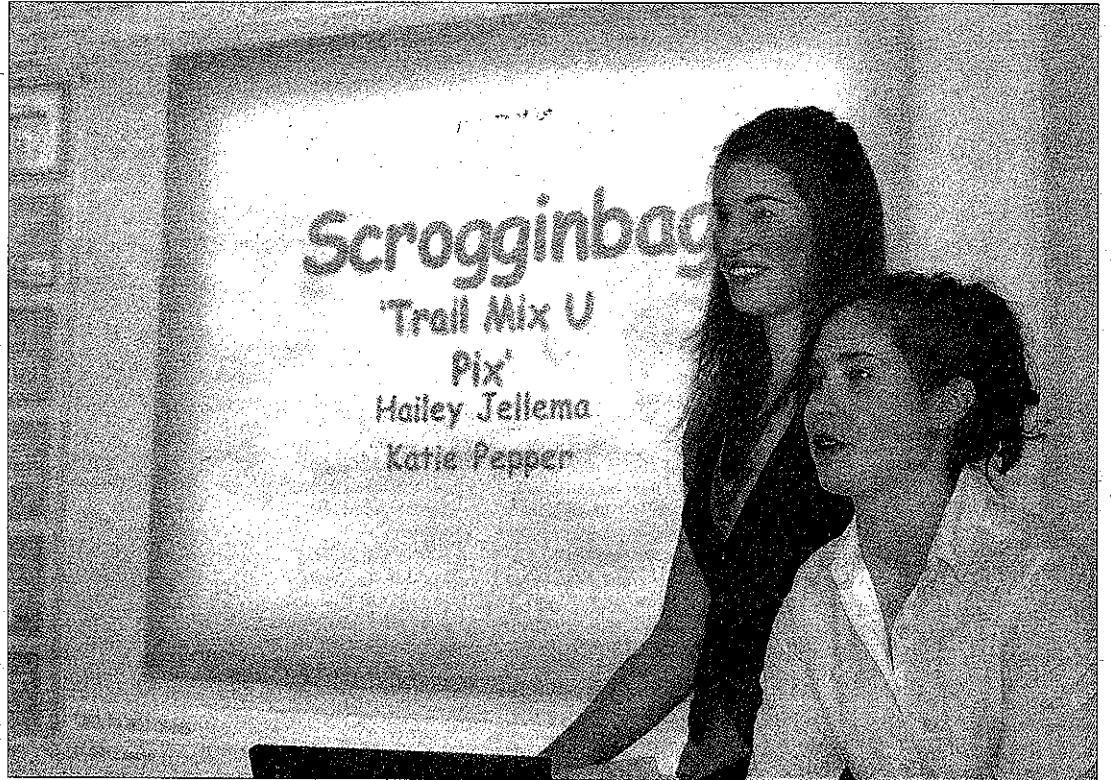
"It gives them licence to be creative and throw stuff out there. Some of the ideas they come up with are unbelievable, and a lot of them will work really well," said Everitt.

The contest will conclude with task three May 7, where the remaining teams will present their final business plans. The top-three from each category will earn a chunk of the \$3,500 of prize money to help get their ideas off the ground, with an additional innovation prize also up for grabs.

Financial sponsors include CIBC, Nixon Wenger, Romei Plummer and West Wood Electrical Services.

The winners will be announced at a special luncheon May 13 at the Okanagan College cafeteria.

Vernon Secondary School students Hailey Jellema and Katie Pepper came across their idea after noticing the school's attempt to move away from junk food. Recognizing a gap



GRAEME CORBETT/MORNING STAR

VSS students Hailey Jellema (right) and Katie Pepper pitch their Scrogginbag trail mix business idea to the Dragon's Den judges at Okanagan College. The winners of this entrepreneurial challenge will be announced at a luncheon May 13 at the college cafeteria.

in the process, they developed Scrogginbag, a line of gourmet trail mix.

"As athletes and students, we're always on the go," said Jellema.

"Also, with the healthy lifestyles program in the schools, a lot of our vending machine foods have been taken out, and there hasn't really been anything that's replaced it. We were bringing this stuff just for us to school to have as snacks, and people were asking to try it."

One thing Jellema and Pepper didn't fully consider was the amount of research required to develop their product line.

"It took us three weeks just to find burlap fabric that wasn't soaked in petroleum oil," said Jellema of the Scrogginbag packaging material. "We have an environmental platform, so we were trying to find burlap sacking that was soaked in vegetable oil instead. That

took forever."

Added Pepper: "We're trying to be really truthful and telling everything about our business that we can so everyone knows what they're getting."

Okanagan College business student Brittany Sjoblom is thrilled the Vernon School District and Community Futures are partnering with Dragon's Den.

"In most high schools, there's not a whole lot of business experience or business classes," said Sjoblom, who is a member of the college's Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) program.

"When I was in high school, I had no idea of business or entrepreneurship, so it really surprises me and makes me feel happy when I see these students and the ideas they come up with.

"It's fun watching what they come up with because I don't think I could have done

that when I was in Grade 8. More businesses should be listening to them because they come up with some phenomenal stuff."

Susan Egan, an economics teacher at VSS, is delighted with the enthusiasm being shown by students for Dragon's Den.

"This (task) is very competitive because we're dropping down to just four teams in each category," said Egan, of the task two competition.

Other innovative student entrepreneurial ideas included fruit-juice lollipops; a babysitter bag loaded with games, toys and other practical items to keep kids entertained; a line of gourmet fillings to make dishes like chicken neptune and cordon bleu; a ski scooter that works much like a sidewalk scooter, only with a ski instead of wheels; and a hydro tap, which, when added to an irrigation system can prevent over-watering.