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By Mary Crawford, NCTA News

Students mean business

CURTIS, Neb. – When tech entrepreneur Jeff Hoffman, who is also interested in agriculture, had a chance to share business ideas with college students, they were all ears.

Four students taking an entrepreneurship course at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis participated at the 7th Midwest Entrepreneurship Conference in Omaha.

NCTA students Laura Rody of Cozad, Melissa Ward of Thermopolis, Wyo., Samantha “Sam” Lau of Corsica, S.D., and Trevin Likens of Fairbury attended.

They gleaned advice from 10 speakers on business and start-up ventures, explored a job fair, and watched as four contestants made their business pitches to a panel of venture capitalists.

A highlight was hearing from Jeff Hoffman, international businessman, motivational speaker and recording producer. He led start-up companies Priceline.com and Ubid.com.

“Jeff Hoffman was a great speaker, and we were able to hear both of his presentations,” said Samantha “Sam” Lau, a livestock management major from Corsica, S.D.

His advice resonated with the students.

“All of the speakers told us it is better to fail at least two times in business before succeeding because then you have an understanding of what to do better,” Lau said.

The Cozad Development Corporation was recruiting entrepreneurs to its community, when Laura Rody served her agribusiness internship at the CDC and Cozad Chamber of Commerce.

Through Rody’s impetus, the CDC paid for the NCTA students’ registrations so they could attend the two-day conference and assist in staffing a CDC recruitment booth in Omaha.

Rody is a non-traditional student at NCTA, moving from California to Dawson County to manage a family farm. Without an agricultural background, she has taken a variety of ag classes the last three semesters and is keen on marketing and business management.

She helped organize the Pitch it in Cozad Business Idea Contest, which concludes May 1. The entrepreneur conference in Omaha was an ideal class project, as well as great learning experience.

“I really appreciate Jeff Hoffman’s input,” Rody said. “He answered questions and met with us to visit.”

After the Omaha conference, the students submitted reports to their professor, Mary Rittenhouse, chair of the NCTA Agribusiness Management division.

“In addition to hearing nationally-known entrepreneurs, the students had an opportunity to meet Mr. Hoffman and visit with him about innovation opportunities in agriculture,” Rittenhouse said.

“It was a great experience for our students,” she added.

Lau is now combining her family farming background in South Dakota with NCTA courses in veterinary technology, and wants to emphasize large animal production and nutrition.

“Someday, I may go into business, but for now I am interested in swine production,” the second-year student said. Her summer internship will be in a pig grower unit near her home in South Dakota.

With true entrepreneurial spirit, Rody isn’t ceasing her marketing work with community and economic development.

“Even though my internship is finished, I still volunteer with CDC, and would like to continue in that field of business development,” Rody said.



NCTA students Trevin Likens and Samantha Lau, at left, and Melissa Ward, right, met worldwide entrepreneur Jeff Hoffman. (Photo by Laura Rody)

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