

THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP experience

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Thomas Edison said that genius was one per cent inspiration and 99 per cent perspiration. Recognition of the value of hard work in achieving success and innovation is what Conestoga's "Experience Entrepreneurship" program is all about, and Edison would likely have approved.

The series of workshops and mentorship sessions draws on the experience of successful entrepreneurs from the community, and gives Conestoga students practical insight into the hard work associated with running successful businesses.

Students who complete 10 hours of mentorship and attend at least five workshops are credited with a program certificate designation on their College transcript. Still in its first year, the program started off as a pilot funded by the Ministry of Economic Development and Innovation and Conestoga Students Inc. with the support of several other community organizations.

Experience Entrepreneurship coordinator Sandie Heirwegh, who runs a company that trains entrepreneurs internationally, sees entrepreneurship and small business as important economic drivers in a community.

According to Heirwegh, the program is designed to give students some exposure to entrepreneurship and small business and will provide valuable insights to those who may pursue entrepreneurship as a career choice.

Mentors from various businesses, from printing companies to high tech, give back to the community through the program, as they share opportunities for networking with employee prospects and other mentors.

Nathan Greene, a Kitchener native, is in his last year of Conestoga's three-year advanced diploma program in business administration marketing.

"Since I'm in my third year, I've been going to job fairs," said Greene. "Employers are looking for entrepreneurship background or experience in that type of field."

Greene has been interested in small business and entrepreneurship since he began his studies at Conestoga.

Workshops and mentoring are provided across a number of faculties in the college.

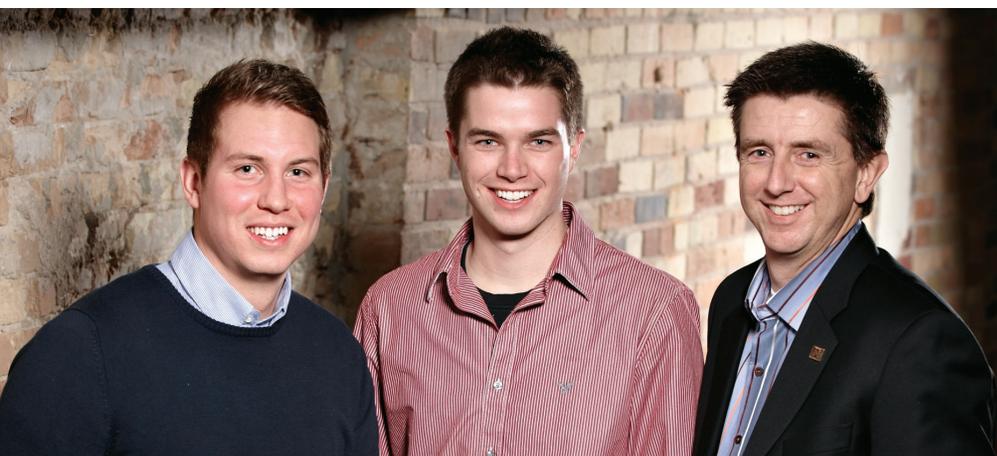
In March, students had the opportunity to present their business concepts to a panel of judges through the Venture Challenge, similar in concept to *Dragons' Den*. In April, community business leaders will teach students the importance of social networking at a session to be held at Communitech.

"We have a practical approach," said Heirwegh. "We have called on community business people and in many cases our own alumni to mentor students and tell their stories. We've had a fantastic response."

Greene is currently working occasionally for his mentor Mike Jennings, president of MoreSales.ca, a Cambridge-based sales and marketing consulting company. According to Jennings, participation in the program is his way of giving back to the community: "We all went to school at some point, and I always found it helpful when people from real businesses gave us real advice and opportunities."

Jennings added that the Experience Entrepreneurship program provides him with a chance to gauge the calibre of the students and provide them with feedback on how they can be more job-ready when they come out of school.

"We need to give them more street smarts and a taste of what the real world is all about, especially at the pace at which things move." ■



At left: Students Nathan Greene [far left] and Brett Martin were mentored by Moresales.ca's Mike Jennings as part of the Experience Entrepreneurship program coordinated by Conestoga's Sandie Heirwegh (far right).