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Students get real-world business experience

Cal State San Marcos program pairs college seniors with local companies

By Heather Anderson

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ESCONDIDO — Student projects from the Cal State San Marcos Senior Experience Program were on display Thursday night at the California Center for the Arts, Escondido.

The College of Business Administration (CoBA) program matches local businesses and non profit organizations with teams of final-semester business students in an effort to provide students with real-world experience, said Keith Butler, director of the program.

“The program has four components that make it unique: it’s team-based, students take on a real-world project, the program is a semester long and it’s required for graduation,” Butler said.

Butler added that the Senior Experience Program, which included 45 teams of four to five students this semester, is the only of its kind in the country.

Student teams staffed booths during the event, demonstrating their projects for attendees.

Brian Prillaman, a service sector management major from Carlsbad, said his team created a 2006 media budget and marketing plan for Biggs Harley-Davidson of San Marcos.

“We separated each part of their company into five sections, and recommended which items to market during certain times of the year; for example, new motorcycles and service right before summer, in time for rides, and winter gear when it cools off,” Prillaman said.

Jim Lillibridge, administration manager for Biggs and the company’s student supervisor, said he was impressed with the team’s recommendation.

“Before, we were marketing according to our events, but now we’ll be marketing according to season,” Lillibridge said.

Biggs has worked with Senior Experience teams for at least two years, Lillibridge said.

Jessica Steiner, an accounting major from Escondido, developed department-specific software training manuals for Innovative Body Science (IBS) of Carlsbad, a private label spa treatment product company that counts among its clients Las Vegas’s Mandalay Bay and MGM Grand resort spas, and the nationwide Bath & Body Works chain.

“IBS recently converted to the SYSPRO accounting software system, so we interviewed and observed their staff to develop SYSPRO training manuals based on how each department uses it,” Steiner said.

The evening was also an opportunity for the CoBA Center for Leadership Innovation and Mentorship Building (CLIMB) program to award local businessman Richard Hunter with its annual Outstanding Business Leader award.

Hunter is president and CEO of San Marcos-based Hunter Industries, a manufacturer of irrigation equipment for the landscape and golf course industries. The company is the largest privately owned employer in San Marcos, with 1,150 employees, and records \$250 million in annual sales.

Hunter advised students to learn from their mistakes, because “not doing so only qualifies you as a successful manager of failure.”

The honoree also urged students to keep an open mind when entering the job market.

“Believe it or not, there aren’t very many people who dreamed of going to work for a sprinkler company,” Hunter said. He stressed that great careers can be found outside