

SAN MARCOS: City officials tap CSUSM students for help with "signature event" project

Business majors challenged to come up with annual showcase for San Marcos

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Challenged by the City Council to create a "signature event" to raise San Marcos' profile, city officials have enlisted the help of a successful Cal State San Marcos program that puts students to work on real-life business problems.

A team of five seniors in CSUSM's College of Business took on the project in early September. Within a few weeks, the team had developed a public survey to help identify the type of event community members want to see in the city.

The survey was posted on the city's Web site at san-marcos.net, where it will remain through Saturday.

City spokeswoman Jenny Peterson said Thursday that she and other city officials meet with the students regularly to discuss their efforts and are impressed with the results so far.

"You think, 'Oh, they're students; how efficient are they going to be, how tangible a product are we going to get?'" she said. "(But) it's been fantastic. Their professionalism is off the charts, their thought process is clear and concise, and we're confident that at the end of the day, we'll have some good results to take to the City Council."

The quest for a signature event began in March, when council members said they wanted to see San Marcos hold a large-scale event that would showcase the city and attract people from throughout San Diego County and possibly beyond.

The Temecula Valley Balloon & Wine Festival, Escondido's Grape Day celebration and an internationally known marathon that Carlsbad hosts every year were some of the examples council members cited.

Peterson said city Community Services Director Craig Sargent-Beach came up with the idea of asking the Cal State San Marcos students for help.

The team's members are all involved in CSUSM's Senior Experience program this semester.

Established in 1993, the program gives business students "real world" experience by matching them with companies and nonprofits that need to create new business or marketing plans, analyze their customer bases or carry out research projects.

Executives at companies and organizations that have used the program's students in the past have said they provide services similar to those offered by professional consultants who charge hundreds of dollars an hour.

Senior Experience teams charge businesses \$1,500 for their services, but nonprofits and other noncommercial entities, including the city, pay nothing.

CSUSM finance major Zonia Yee is heading up the team. Marketing major Peter Nicholson, finance major Jessica Antes, management major Michael Miller, and management information systems major Richard Morris make up the rest of the team.

Yee said the group was one of seven Senior Experience teams that vied for the chance to work on the city challenge.

The team won out over the others by arguing that the diversity of its members' majors make the group ideal for the job, she said.

"We figured those are going to be all the key factors that are going to be necessary to actually put on an event," said Yee. "(And) we thought it would be a great project to show the city of San Marcos and the community that the students at CSUSM can work very closely with the city of San Marcos."

The team also saw a chance to make a mark on the city, she added.

"Hopefully, we can implement our project and kind of leave our legacy behind," Yee said.

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