

College business board formed

By ADAM JOHNSON
Staff Writer

NORTHFIELD — Several prominent Northfield entities are partnering in an effort to promote business growth and community interaction.

The partnership, which includes First National Bank of Northfield, the Northfield Enterprise Center (NEC), Carleton College, St. Olaf College, and other businesses, is called the College Board of Business Consultants (CBBC) and will begin this fall.

The program will match enterprising students from the colleges with area businesses and non-profit organizations to research and develop business strategies.

Unlike a standard college internship, the students don't receive credit toward their majors or receive pay. However, the CBBC will allow students to gain extensive experience in marketing and business structure, as well as connecting them to emerging local businesses.

First National Bank Vice President Rick Estenson said he had thought of the idea as a way to establish an ongoing relationship between growing businesses and their neighbors, the young business-savvy college students looking for a chance to utilize their skills.

"I thought that it would be nice to have a better tie-in with the two colleges," Estenson said. "This is very much about finding



The students and program advisors that make up the First National Bank of Northfield College Board of Business Consultants. Front Row: Steve Vilendrer, Nancy Theide, Anna Gamble, Oyeyinka Oyeyinka, Isil Cinar, Ethan Singer. Middle Row: Brandon Sun, Lynda Grady, Dave Shumway, Bob Will, Sian Muir, Claudia Klug. Back Row: Tim Blaha, Ollie Garrison, Doug Lind, Blaine Anderson, Rick Estenson. (Submitted photo)

young businesses that need business plans and marketing plans and connecting them with students."

Several program partners said they are excited about the benefits the CBBC could provide for Northfield's business community.

"I've got a lot of new businesses that are looking for business plans," NEC Executive Director Lynda Grady said. "It's the first year of this program, so we're interested to see how it turns out."

The group of 12 Carleton and St. Olaf students were selected through an interview process this past spring and will be paired with a local business at the beginning of the school year.

They will then devote about 30 hours of time, over a 10-week period this fall, to researching the needs of the company and devising an improvement strategy.

Both colleges have assigned an advisor to assist students in the program, though the work will be done mostly independent of

supervision.

"I think it's a marvelous way to assist local firms, both start-ups and smaller firms," Carleton CBBC advisor Bob Will said.

"They've got the potential to do some useful things."

The NEC has been working to establish which businesses will participate, and though a finalized list has not been made, the students' tasks likely will include projects such as the redesign of a business Web site or a new marketing strategy.

The intent is to provide a local business with valuable research while giving the students an opportunity to gain real-world experience.

"It's not hard to see there are some advantages for everyone here," Estenson said.

Assuming the program is successful this fall, the CBBC will continue this spring with new projects, new businesses, and new students.

"This is going to evolve and we'll need people to step forward with meaningful projects," Estenson said.

Carleton Career Center director Chris Oatis-Skinner said she is excited about the potential benefits the program will provide.

"I think it's win-win when students get involved in the community," Skinner said.

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