

Swift Current students won Saskatchewan Polytechnic business challenge in November

By MATTHEW LIEBENBERG —
mliebenberg@prairiepost.com

Four Grade 11 accounting students from the Swift Current Comprehensive High School (SCCHS) showed their business acumen by winning Saskatchewan Polytechnic's day-long business challenge for high-school students.

The 3rd annual Business and Beyond competition for Grade 11 and 12 students was hosted by Saskatchewan Polytechnic's School of Business on the Moose Jaw campus, Nov. 25.

The Swift Current team of Gage Haubrich, Bryce Magkasi, Errylson Oledan and Carter Wotton was selected as one of the top four teams and their business idea received the nod from judges in the *Dragons' Den* style final.

"I was pretty excited," Haubrich said. "I didn't think we were going to make it in the top four because we're only in Grade 11, and then we ended up getting in there. I didn't expect that, and I didn't expect to win either."

Eighteen teams from schools across the province participated in the competition. They accumulated points during the morning session in different rounds that focused on six business specialties — accountancy, financial services, human resources, insurance, management and marketing.

Some rounds had a question and answer format, but for others the teams had to do scenario analysis or make brief presentations. Haubrich felt the competition was already intense during the morning.

"It was pretty crazy for some of it because in the insurance one you had to make a noise first to get your team to answer because it was like *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*," he explained. "So every team was yelling and sometimes it was pretty close and then you would get mad if you thought you got first before the other guys."

In the marketing round his team was asked to make a pitch to the audience on a new product, a shark sleeping bag.

"It was a sleeping bag that just looked like a shark and they gave us 10 minutes to make a two-minute thing about it," he said. "So we had to talk about how a shark sleeping bag was cool and we referenced *Sharknado*, that movie."

The competition became even more intense after the top four teams were announced during lunch. The finalists had to create a business plan for a product within a short period. They then made a pitch to a panel of Saskatchewan Polytechnic business teachers.

"You only had 45 minutes to get your presentation

ready," he said. "We were yelling at each other in the room the whole time because we didn't think we were going to have time to get anything ready. So we were all yelling at each other to try and fix things and make it better. It was pretty intense."

The Swift Current team had to create a business idea for a product from the music industry.

The other three teams, all from Moose Jaw, created presentations for products related to the health sector, pets and ice cream.

Haubrich felt the members of his team worked well together because they were willing to disagree with each other.

"The reason I think we worked good together is because lots of the teams out there were really good friends," he said. "We weren't like the best friends. We always had different opinions on everything. So we could actually argue about it and get the best one for everything."

For their product presentation they decided to focus on a mobile app that will promote the music of up and coming musicians.

"We didn't really know what to do because it was music, so we couldn't actually just make a physical product, but we didn't want to copy an app that was already there," he said. "We wanted to make an app, because then there wouldn't be a production cost and we also wanted to do something that wasn't done before. ... Anybody who wanted to get noticed would sign on to our app and then people would pay to subscribe to them."

SCCHS business education teacher Cindy Lowe took four teams from Swift Current to this year's Business and Beyond competition, the maximum number of teams allowed per school for the event.

SCCHS students attended the competition last year for the first time, when she was able to take six teams and one of them finished in second place.

"We went last year not knowing at all how to prep and the kids did pretty well considering I didn't know what it would look like in the morning," she said. "This year I knew there would be six rounds of competitions on different topics."

The students prepared for two months for the competition. In addition to information provided by Lowe during accounting classes, there were regular meetings of the SCCHS Business Club.

Lowe started the club informally last year and it became a more formal club this year. It currently has around 20 members and interest is still growing.

"I started this business club to give kids that are interested in business something to do in high school," she said.

She arranged a number of guest speakers to help students prepare for the competition in Moose Jaw.

"So I'm trying to prep them for the competition, but I'm also trying to teach them about business in all of these different areas and turn them on to a career in business," she said. "A lot of these kids are interested in being accountants, but there's more than just that out there that they can pick from."

Regina marketing consultant Jeph Maystruck spoke to them about marketing and entrepreneurship, Tyler Fleury of the Cypress Health Region talked about human resources and Scott Cassidy, an investment advisor in Swift Current, made a presentation about finance and insurance.

"That was one area the kids didn't know anything about, but Scott gave them a really good overview of types of insurance and what insurance is used for and those were actually questions that the kids got asked," Lowe said.

She said the students are keen to learn and they have a lot of questions about business and finance. Their participation in the business club and in the competition in Moose Jaw have been a real benefit for the students.

"I've seen a huge increase in self esteem and self



Photos contributed

Sixteen Grade 11 and 12 students from Swift Current participated in the 3rd annual Business and Beyond competition hosted by the Saskatchewan Polytechnic School of Business in Moose Jaw, Nov. 25. They are pictured with SCCHS business education teacher Cindy Lowe.

confidence and empowerment in these kids that have attended," she said. "Some of these kids aren't in other clubs and so they've felt a sense of belonging."

Over the next few months the students will prepare for another major competition, hosted by the Saskatchewan Business Teachers Association (SBTA) on May 5 and 6 at the University of Saskatchewan Edwards School of Business.

Lowe, who is the SBTA secretary, said this competition has a different format from the one in Moose Jaw.

"It's a two-day tournament where they are presented with a finance or entrepreneurship case that they analyze, come up with alternatives and do a proposal," she explained. "Then the top teams are picked and also go into the final round. The one we just finished was more of a jeopardy round where they accumulate points, whereas the one coming up at the university is a case competition where they analyze cases."

She is planning to have a few more guest speakers to assist students with their preparation and there will also be some practice rounds to select the students for the team.

"I'm going to have to do a mini competition in Swift Current just to pick who I take because I can only take six," she said.

The prizes at these competitions present significant opportunities for students who are planning their post secondary education. The first prize at the Business and Beyond competition in Moose Jaw included \$500 scholarships to Saskatchewan Polytech and business textbooks while the SBTA competition will include \$1,000 university scholarships for all students who are selected to participate.

Lowe thanked the SCCHS, Chinook School Division and premier sponsor Innovation Credit Union for supporting the activities of the SCCHS Business Club.

"The school helps us financially but they can't pay for everything," she said. "It's really been Innovation Credit Union that has stepped forward and helped us finance this club. ... They believe in developing business students and so they're supporting us with lunch and learns and travel and transportation, with any cost associated with running the club."



A team of four Grade 11 accounting students from Swift Current won the 3rd annual Saskatchewan Polytechnic Business and Beyond competition in Moose Jaw, Nov. 25. Pictured from left to right, SCCHS business education teacher Cindy Lowe with students Gage Haubrich, Carter Wotton, Errylson Oledan, and Bryce Magkasi.