

NEW HAMPSHIRE

# BUSINESS REVIEW

•diversions

## Adobe ovens: Beyond the grill

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## Pease picks up the pieces after Skybus departure

### TRANSPORTATION

By Roger Wood

Late in February, Skybus Airlines founder Bill Diffenderfer, speaking at a Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce breakfast forum, predicted a bright future for the budget-priced air carrier.

But only weeks later, Diffenderfer had resigned and the airline filed for

bankruptcy and ceased operations. The shutdown, less than a year after the airline's launch, left Skybus travelers stranded, creditors seeking payment for aircraft and services, and an empty passenger terminal at Pease International Airport in Portsmouth.

The airline was the latest to offer regular passenger service at Pease, and the latest disappointment to those who want to see the airport prosper.



Pease Development Authority Executive Director Dick Green: Looking for yet another new airline for the airport. (AP Photo)

"We thought Skybus was going to be the answer to our prayers to having regular passenger service out of Portsmouth International Airport," said Art Nickless, chair of the Pease Development Authority, which oversees the airport. "The Skybus thing was such a crushing blow because it's exactly what everybody wanted — daily flights to locations people

**Skybus departure** page 12



Three Velcro USA employees — from right, Jason Bean of Manchester, Michael Drake of Hooksett and Terry Roberge of Hooksett — wait for the signal to rip their Velcro pieces on Elm Street in Manchester. They were among hundreds of former and current employees of the Manchester-based company who lined up for more than a mile to rip apart strips of the company's famous fasteners as part of a May 13 celebration of the 50th anniversary of the day the Velcro brand was trademarked in the United States. Velcro USA employs some 600 people in Manchester and Somersworth and has another manufacturing plant in Mexico, a warehouse and distribution center in Arizona and a marketing office in Michigan. (AP Photo)

## Students' solutions aim to solve state's 'brain drain'

### EDUCATION

By Cindy Kibbe

Like many of New Hampshire's college students, Colin VanDenBerghe, a senior, was planning to move out of New Hampshire — he had his heart set on California — after graduating from Plymouth State University in the spring. A school project, however, changed his mind.

VanDenBerghe and nearly 100 business and marketing students from New Hampshire's public colleges and universities collaborated on ways to make the Granite State more attractive to new graduates and stanch the flow of its "brain drain."

As a project for the 55% Initiative, an effort spearheaded by University System of New Hampshire Chancellor Steven Reno, the students worked with their instructors to develop communications channels and marketing initiatives designed to attract and



Stephen Reno, university system chancellor: 'The people that we hear from today are the new New Hampshire.'

keep New Hampshire's college graduates in state.

According to a university system study, 41 percent of the state's graduating college students intended to leave the state, 37 percent planned on staying and some 22 percent were undecided.

"If we could keep just 10 percent more of our graduates in New Hampshire, or about 55 percent, it would have the effect of adding \$650 million over five years to New Hampshire's economy," said Reno at a May 2 presentation at Red River Theatres in Concord. In

**Solutions to 'brain drain'** page 28

## N.H., Quebec push business cooperation

### INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

By Bob Sanders

With an economic slump affecting both sides of the Canadian border, and despite a growing trade imbalance, the Quebec and New Hampshire chambers of commerce met in New Hampshire May 12 to formalize their cooperative efforts with the aim of remaining more competitive in international markets.

While the agreement doesn't include the billion-dollar elephant sitting in the living room — the wood industry — the Business and Industry Association of New Hampshire and the Federation of Chambers of Commerce of Quebec forged the Quebec-New Hampshire Business Partnership, a document that sketches in broad terms the areas on which the business organizations hope to cooperate. The one specific item that featured in the agreement is to meet once a year and provide links on each other's Web sites.

"New Hampshire's major trade partner is Canada," said Jim Roche, president of the BIA, which also is the state's chamber of

**Quebec cooperation** page 13

**GLOBAL Connections**

Newton firm fills world's demand for grinding machines

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# RESOURCES • education

## Solutions to 'brain drain'

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attendance were some 50 members of the business community, government, nonprofit organizations and the media.

Students from the University of New Hampshire's Durham and Manchester campuses, Plymouth State University and Keene State College attempted to help solve the problem by shedding a brighter light on why so many young people leave the state. They presented ideas based on their research and marketing strategies developed during the spring semester.

Reno said that the students' marketing efforts were important to listen to. "The people that we hear from today are the new New Hampshire."

Most telling about the students' research was that communication was lacking across the continuum — from students to schools to businesses.

Brian Pouliot, a senior at UNH Manchester, said his group's research revealed that the stu-

dents they surveyed for their project were "completely unaware" of the state's exodus of graduates.

What was more, "students didn't know where to go for information" to learn more about job opportunities within the state, he said.

The four schools each have a career development office, but many students were, by and large, unaware of its existence.

And of those students who did know about such services, most found the staff — generally a handful of personnel or as few as one — too overwhelmed to be of much help.

"It's impossible for just one or two people to handle a campus of thousands," said UNH Manchester senior Erin Hunt.

Traditional resources for students also were found lacking.

Pouliot said Web research by his team found "old information" for students seeking information about what schools had to offer for newly minted graduates. They also found internship postings so far behind that they still listed opportunities from 1996. And many of the contacts

from more recent postings no longer worked at the offering firms.

### A 'disconnect'

Job fairs didn't fare so well, either. "Many companies at the fairs weren't even hiring," said Pouliot.

Hunt said there was also little — if any — notice about jobs fairs.

The UNH Manchester group also felt that job fairs weren't targeted enough. "For instance, don't hold an accounting fair and invite engineering students," said Pouliot.

Some groups even found fault with school curricula.

For example, one particular Keene area high-tech business uses a programming language not even taught at KSC.

The Keene students said they felt there needed to be a focus on learning skills businesses want, and that the education community should design courses that match those skills.

That was just one example of the large "disconnect" that all of the students pointed to between

colleges and businesses.

The Keene group said, in one instance, a communications coordinator at a Keene economic development organization didn't have a way to inform KSC students of what businesses were offering because there was no specific contact person at the college for such information.

The UNH Manchester group said the 25 businesses it surveyed couldn't find the help they needed locally. "Businesses want to know what universities have to offer," said Pouliot.

Pervasive among the data were students' impressions of New Hampshire "lacking its own identity" and being little more than a "suburb of Boston."

All of the groups said much more needs to be done in communicating the Granite State's virtues to younger people — affordable housing (compared to Boston), safety, the availability of a "metropolitan lifestyle," even good-paying jobs.

The power of information in students' hands was such that five of the 18 students who worked on PSU's 35-member project and had expected to leave the state — including VanDenBerghe — changed their minds and decided to stay in New Hampshire as a result of their research.

### Marketing efforts

The students from the four presenting schools developed a number of recommendations for New Hampshire's public institutions to consider for increasing new grad retention in the state.

Chief among the proposed solutions was development of a Web site not only containing current job, internship and career information, but information on the state itself, including salaries, lifestyle and entertainment.

Most of the groups suggested that USNH be the organization to pull such a Web site together because of its central point of contact for all the state's public colleges.

The student researchers also recommended some type of "work, play and stay" advertising campaign targeting students and informing them about New Hampshire's advantages. And they called for vastly improving, even overhauling, communications channels among students, schools and businesses, again looking to USNH to facilitate the connections.

One of the more imaginative solutions proposed by KSC included a job fair shuttle that links the colleges and universities, citing the impact of high gas prices.

The Keene students also suggested making mandatory the "Transition to the Workplace" course — currently a one-credit elective teaching job skill basics, such as interviewing techniques and resume writing — or waiving that class if a student has lined up an internship.

Moving forward, USNH and other stakeholders will be looking at the students' recommendations to develop a pilot marketing campaign. It will be launched in the fall at the campuses of UNH in Durham and Daniel Webster College in Nashua.

Public relations agencies Tracey Edwards O'Neil of Bedford and Bresette & Co. in Portsmouth have volunteered to help with the campaign's design, and Manchester Web integrator SilverTech will develop the Web site solution pro bono.

And VanDenBerghe of PSU, who gave up on his erstwhile plan to move to the West Coast after working on his team's project, agreed. "Look to New Hampshire first to build a career and to build a life," he said. **NBR**



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