

Pot sweetened for Alaska Marketplace winners

Monday, April 10, 2006 - by Rhonda McBride



Phil Walczak/KTUU-TV

Anchorage, Alaska - It was a dramatic conclusion last week in the Alaska Marketplace competition. Forty-three finalists were expected to divvy up \$200,000 among 20 winning business ideas. At the last minute, BP Exploration (Alaska) Inc. upped the ante to \$500,000.

Ted Neville pitched his worm-growing business. The idea is to feed the worms to chickens and then collect the chicken's

eggs.

"You could put several of these farms in a village and produce all of the eggs that the village eats," said Ted Neville, Willow micro farmer.

It's just one of the many ideas hatched at the Alaska Marketplace competition. The banner says it all: "Dreamers wanted." One group of women wants to launch a marketing company.



Phil Walczak/KTUU-TV

"When the community gets together, entrepreneurs within the region would say, 'Oh, opportunity,'" said Cana Uluak Crosby, Mitailaq Marketing.



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Opportunity wasn't just knocking here, it was ringing loud and clear. Each finalist had five minutes to make their pitch. Judge Orie Williams has some tough standards, and the St. George Island Institute Co. measured up. The institute came away with \$50,000 in seed money to finance

its cultural, historical and scientific academies.

What this business has in common with the rest of the entries is a plan to generate jobs in rural Alaska.

"Alaska's been built on hope. I mean America's been built on hope. Not just Alaska. Alaska, like America, is small business," said Williams, Doyon Corporation CEO and contest judge.

John Oscar has big dreams for his artwork, which he now markets on the Internet from Mekoryuk.



Phil Walczak/KTUU-TV



"I have a house there already. I want to convert that house into manufacturing," said Oscar (left).

With \$20,000 in prize money, Oscar hopes to expand and

hire more apprentices.

“The guy that I started with was only making \$7.50 an hour. He’s making \$15 an hour now. That is a high-paying rate in the village,” said Oscar.

Not all the presentations were slick. Two men from Savoonga had a homemade sign to pitch their idea for a small motor repair shop. They were awarded \$30,000 in seed money. The judges say it was their commitment that sold them.

“If two or three of these ideas really take off, it’d be such a catalyst for even greater economic activity in the Bush. Who knows what the potential of something like this is,” said Al Bolea (above right), president of BP Exploration.



The potential is using what we have around us, like Sitka spruce, to make guitars. Or even wildlife. Chevak Bird and Cultural Tours won \$25,000. The Sparck family triplets from Bethel will receive \$20,000 to develop a line of cosmetics using salmon berries. Even mud has possibilities. Just imagine women paying top dollar for a glacial facial.

“It competes most notably with the best selling Dead Sea mud,” said Lauren Padawer of [Glacial Mud Co., LLC](#).

Only this is Copper River silt that fishermen know all too well. But the catch here is \$16,000 in prize money.

“What surprised me is that probably from some very small dollars, that some of these ideas could be brought forward and really marketed and some money made,” said Jim Bowles (right), ConocoPhillips Alaska president.



What’s chicken feed for a big corporation could turn out to be a golden goose for rural Alaska. All 43 finalists received at least \$1,000.



The competition is sponsored by the Alaska Federation of Natives, modeled after a successful World Bank program. AFN hopes to have more of these competitions. But BP has committed any money yet.

BP felt that \$200,000 was too small a pie. They thought the grants wouldn’t be big enough for businesses to really get off the ground.

For more information visit the [Alaska Federation of Natives Web site](#) at www.nativefederation.org

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