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THOMAS CLARKSON, FORMERLY OF IPIVOT



PEGGY PEATTIE / Union-Tribune photos

Hands on: David Philips of David Philips Associates tests a Stowaway Portable Keyboard from Think Outside, one of the finalists in the Most Innovative Product category at this year's UCSD Connect competition.

CONNECTING

The goal is to link inventors with investors, turn ideas into products

1999 Winners



Charles Gaylord, right, receives the Technology

By Mike Drummond
STAFF WRITER

In 1988, when the late Bill Otterson needed entrants for a new contest honoring home-grown entrepreneurial inventors, he turned to Jerry Caulder, a friend and the CEO of Mycogen, a biotech.

"I need you to submit a new product for our 'Most Innovative Products' award," Otterson said. Caulder responded that he had no such product to offer.

"Then get one," Otterson replied.

Caulder complied, and perhaps not coincidentally, Mycogen, now part of Dow Chemicals, was among three companies to win the inaugural award from Otterson's organization — UCSD Connect.

That was 12 years ago. Today, winning the award takes much more than knowing the right people. Hundreds of com-

panies that were there."

UCSD Connect was born in 1985 with a mission to marry inventors with investors and help turn high-tech ideas in the lab — or the garage — into products on the market.

It provides management and marketing resources, and perhaps most important, networking opportunities in the larger business community.

"If you're looking for money, it absolutely opens doors to the venture capital community," says Thomas Clarkson, formerly a marketing executive at Ipivot, a finalist this year that was bought by Intel.

The increasing popularity of Connect reflects the growth of high-tech as an economic force in the region — a force that owes no small debt to Connect and Otterson.

Many local entrepreneurs and venture capitalists credit Connect with forming the petri dish where inventors, in-

Jon Krakauer's first-person account, "Into Thin Air," is required reading.

Northrop's daylong Shakespeare seminar was considerably more sedate, although some executives were wincing as Adelman showed movie snippets of the Battle of Agincourt with Kenneth Branagh playing King Henry in grunting.

Perry

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open IAFP.

A proposal to allow non-CFPs to carry the designation of associate CFP was ridiculed out of existence by opponents who dubbed it "CFP lite."

Instead, starting Jan. 1, those who are members of the IAFP can be members of the FPA, but they have 10 years in which to earn their CFP credentials. Within three years, no one can join who is not a CFP.

"It will help retain the CFP as the designation of choice," Warschauer says.

It will also, he believes, help keep financial planning individually tailored rather than a cookie-cutter process. "There are many of us who believe financial planning is a very personal business," he says.

"Financial planning improves the quality of life," Rojeck says. "With the help of a financial planner, people can sleep better at night."

When seeking out a financial planner, Blankinship and Rojeck offer the following tips:

- Interview at least three planners.
- Ask to see their credentials or professional licenses.
- Find out how long they've been in practice.
- Inquire about their areas of specialty, what types of clients they typically serve.
- Ask them to explain their business philosophies.
- How are they compensated? Are you comfortable with that? It's not so much how they are paid, Blankinship says, as whether they are objective, fair and professional.
- Remember that bedside manner is critical in the planner-client relationship. "Make sure this person is someone with whom you can share your life's dreams," Blankinship says.

Ann Perry can be reached at moneyperry@aol.com.

Sharpened stakes placed by the English forced the French into a funnel that blocked their retreat.

"What are the leadership traits that Harry shows here?" Adelman asked after the house lights flickered on.

George E. Pickett, vice president for marketing and business, raised his hand. "Henry doesn't show any

creade, the Union general, and Robert E. Lee, the Confederate general, on trips to the Gettysburg battlefield in Pennsylvania.

This strategy of leadership training by role-playing is a matter of necessity, Roche acknowledges. In 1996, Northrop Grumman acquired Westinghouse Electric's military electronics and systems business, which ultimately became the division that Roche now leads.

Shakespeare crash course are part of a grander strategy to raise a new generation of executives to think more creatively and nimbly, Roche says, adding that history offers gripping lessons about decisions made under great stress.

"It does feel like we're in a war," he says. "Remember, we're the little guy in the industry. And our strategy is to teach all our executives to think like chief executives."

Connect

The goal is to link inventors with investors

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years to meet a peer in my industry here in town," says Peter Preuss, a University of California regent. Connect and Otterson created a "comfortable hub for the technology company people to congregate in."

Connect grew legs under the command of Otterson, the founder of Cipher Data Products. A constant cheerleader for the tech community, he took the Connect reins in 1986 and two years later conceived of the Most Innovative Products award.

Under Otterson's leadership, Connect grew from a staff of two with 30 founding sponsors and a budget of \$100,000 to a staff of 15 with more than 600 corporate sponsors and a budget of \$1.7 million.

Last month, Otterson died after a 21-year battle with bone marrow cancer. Now that its energetic king is dead, what will happen to Connect and the Most Innovative Product awards competition?

"Well, the architects of the pyramids must be very proud," Caulder said, when the question was posed recently. "When they died, the pyramids didn't go away. Bill put something in place that will continue to endure and grow."

Indeed, UCSD Connect just added The Bill Otterson award to a growing and morphing list of categories. One of the winners this year was from out of town — a team from UC Riverside. The University of California at Los Angeles has said it wants to grow its own version of Connect. There's even talk of Connect going global.

"I would say that Connect is going to take a direction that none of us even envisioned," says Carole Ekstrom, Connect's director of sponsors and membership. "I think Connect can open up to (become) Worldwide Connect. There's talk of a UC Connect, rather than just UCSD Connect."

Parallel programs based on the UCSD Connect model already have taken root in Sweden, Scotland and at the University of Hawaii.

Otterson "set the standard for his legacy," Leedom says. "Peter Preuss and folks like that will make the organization better for fear of letting it lapse into something less than what it was. They don't want to give any less energy to it than (Otterson) devoted to it, and by virtue of that, it will continue to grow."

To appreciate where Connect is today and where it's going tomorrow, it's helpful to view it through the prism of the past.

For instance, the 1988 Connect Directory, a listing of member and sponsoring companies including the defunct Kaypro Corp., was all of 39 pages and bound with two staples.

The 2000 directory spans 380 pages with full-color ads from the likes of SAIC, Agouron Pharmaceuticals and Gateway. Inside is a welcome letter from Gov. Gray Davis.

A database analysis of all 160 winners and finalists between 1988 and 1998 shows that nearly 90 percent of those companies remain in business, a respectable figure considering most small businesses fail in their first year and 95 out of 100 fail within their first five years, according to the federal Small Business Administration.

Just nine finalists in three categories graced that first awards ceremony, when 100 or so people attended. The winners were Mycogen (now part of Dow Chemicals), Cymer Laser Technologies, which is still in business, and Athens Corp., which has since dropped off the planet.

Although nearly all the finalists and winners are alive, not all are well.

Last year's winner in the Telecommunication's category, USATalks, has been beset with management shake-ups, technical glitches and financial problems.

Isis Pharmaceuticals, a finalist last year, saw its stock collapse this month after failed drug trials.

Wright Strategies, a finalist in 1996 and winner in the Software category in 1997, is defunct. Robert

Wright, head of that company, "was a little bit too arrogant," says Connect's Ekstrom. "Too young and too arrogant. But it proves we're not perfect."

As Leedom notes: "The best products didn't necessarily win, but the most innovative did."

For years, a UCSD Connect committee selected winners. Last year, Connect began using an independent panel of distinguished judges. This year's judges included Peter Ashkin, senior vice president of Gateway; Erkki Ruoslahti, CEO of The Burnham Institute; and Jack White, chairman of Jack White & Co.

"The credibility of the awards has grown," Caulder says. "But that doesn't diminish from the earlier awards. Was the first Oscar any less than the one they just gave out? Of course not."

Connect added and dropped categories through the years. There is no Biotechnology/Medical category anymore. It's now called Life Sciences, reflecting changes in the biotech climate.

"If you create a category for biotech and agriculture, hell I'd win it every year and that wouldn't be kosher," explains Caulder, who now runs Akkadix, a bio/ag start-up.

The Software category arrived in 1990, the now-defunct Techno-Genesis award in 1991, Environmental Technology in 1994, Entertainment and Leisure in 1996, Internet in 1997 and Telecommunications in 1998.

This year drew a record 138 entrants vying for awards in seven categories. The 23 finalists exhibited their technology in a showroom at the Sheraton Hotel on Harbor Island. The competition was fierce.

Loud cheers erupted and high-fives thrown when winners were announced at a luncheon ceremony.

One way to measure the heat of competitive fires is reaction from the also-rans.

A finalist who lost to Ontro, a Poway company that makes self-heating containers to warm beverages, reportedly groused, "I can't believe we lost to a coffee cup."

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