

Link Up to Start Up

By LISA DiTURO '06 A&S

Networking among an experienced executive, an entrepreneur, a faculty member and a graduate leads to a career launch.

It all started back in 1959. That was the year Richard J. Anthony Sr., now founder and managing director of The Solutions Network, Inc., graduated from Villanova University with a degree in liberal arts. But 46 years later, it is Travis McMenimon '05 C&F who is benefiting. How do these two facts connect?

Anthony '59 A&S has extensive experience in organization effectiveness, human resource management and performance improvement. His Pennsylvania-



Last summer, Travis McMenimon '05 C&F was hired by a dining network company, a job lead that came through the entrepreneurial links he helped to forge between his alma mater and the Philadelphia business community.

based firm has a prestigious list of clients. For three years now, he has been running a group called The Entrepreneurs Network of Greater Philadelphia. Its members are aspiring and serial entrepreneurs, that is, those who start a company then leave to launch another. Meeting every six weeks at the Radnor Hotel, the group brings together 40 to 60 people, including angel investors who provide the seed money for ideas and dreams. During the three hour-meeting, about five ideas will be presented. Anyone interested can follow-up on the idea.

"We help each other in pursuit of our own agenda," said Anthony, whose consulting firm is often hired to help get these companies off the ground. "It forms an extensive network that is helpful to people in the room."

Operating with a "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" principle, the meeting last May welcomed four Villanova students who were invited to attend after winning the Start-Up Challenge. More than 100 Villanova undergraduates had participated in this business plan competition sponsored by the Villanova Entrepreneurial Society (VES). Start-Up awards \$5,000 in cash prizes to students. They are "young people with different perspectives who are interested in entre-

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preneurism," Anthony noted. It's "a new ideal," he added. "People are turned off by the corporate world and want to try their hands, some with nets and some without, by going into business for themselves."

Here's where the paths of Anthony and McMenimon intersect. McMenimon, who majored in management information systems and minored in entrepreneurship, at the time was vice president of VES and had been a member for two years. He co-founded the Start-Up Challenge, along with Adam Siegrist '05 C&F, then president of VES.

McMenimon noted, "The Start-Up Challenge is the main vehicle for getting students out into the entrepreneurial community. We conceived the idea and made it happen. We found people to donate money, and got the concept out into the local business community, who really embraced it. We brought in outside entrepreneurial experts to judge the competition."

One of those outside experts was

Anthony, who was invited to be a Start-Up judge by Dr. James W. Klingler, assistant professor of management in the College of Commerce and Finance and faculty advisor for the VES. Anthony, who was thrilled by the program, Start-Up and the ingenuity of the participants, asked Klingler and the four winners to attend the May meeting of The Entrepreneurs Network. He suggested that each student sit at a separate table to ensure that they would interact with other attendees.

At first, the students were a little uneasy, not knowing what their roles would be, says Anthony. But they quickly settled into a comfort zone as more people arrived and they began to converse with others. All who attended had

one minute to explain who they were and why they were there. The students were in the middle of it all, interacting and playing as active a role as the real-life entrepreneurs and investors.

Noted Anthony, "Besides creating a venue allowing students to come together with real-life entrepreneurs and an opportunity to join a company that is just starting out, there's a satisfaction of having good people come together and share information, and sometimes good things come out of it. It's just such a great match."

Anthony said he wishes to see and help in the "continuing, expanding and building of the entrepreneurial program at Villanova." He is an enthusiastic supporter of Klingler, as well as of Klingler's associates and program. Anthony has extended an open invitation to Klingler to bring up to four students to future meetings. (Anthony was featured in the Winter 2004 Villanova Magazine for his idea that led to a Vatican internship

for Villanovans. Villanova's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences awarded him an Alumni Medallion in 2004.)

Ken Schwenke was one of the "real-life" entrepreneurs at the networking meeting in May. Schwenke heads the Off-Campus Dining Network, an alternative to campus meal plans that is now offered at more than 30 colleges and universities nationally (there is a Wildcat plan, but it's for a certain university in Lexington, Ky.). Off-Campus Dining Network uses a pre-paid card to enable students to purchase meals at restaurants near their campus.

Schwenke thought his first Entrepreneurs Network meeting offered a "good forum for otherwise dissembled entities that don't connect: academia, the business community and the investor community. There aren't too many forums where you can get these three groups together."

At the meeting, Schwenke and Klingler were able to sit down and talk. Schwenke found Klingler to be an "energetic and entrepreneurially focused professor," and plans to help out in some of his classes. When Schwenke happened to mention that his company is in a growth mode and is looking to hire new employees, Klingler directed him to McMenimon.

As McMenimon put it, "The rest is history." The May graduate started working for the Off-Campus Dining Network in July as manager of finance and information technology. He states that he is enjoying his new position.

While that meeting may have been the first time that Villanova students have taken part in The Entrepreneurs Network, they certainly proved to be more than novices. Villanova alumni, faculty and students will be coming together, and with the help of the Start-Up Challenge, The Entrepreneurs Network and enthusiastic angels, they will be launching their ideas and dreams into reality.

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