

Angela Sweeps Up With Top Engineering Prize

Posted on Tuesday 17th June 2008

A University of Birmingham Engineering student has won the Midlands BizCom top prize of £2,500 and a place on an exclusive scheme for student entrepreneurs.

Angela Murray, who is a postgraduate student in Chemical Engineering, beat off four other finalists from universities around the West Midlands with her business pitch 'Roads to Riches'.

Her pitch focused on the process to extract precious metals from waste materials, including road dust. Based on her PhD research, her business would take the new method, now tested in the laboratory, and scale it up to a fully operational mobile plant. Platinum, palladium and rhodium, all known as PGMs, are lost from vehicle catalytic converters. Most of this ends up as road dust, which is collected, but not currently recycled, often ending up in landfill sites. PGMs are valuable and increasingly scarce and are a non-renewable global commodity trading for up to £145 per gram.

The competition involved writing a full business plan with financial projections and then pitching the idea to a panel of judges drawn from the business community around the region. Angela was praised for the level of detail and her passion for this innovative technology.

Prior to winning BizCom Angela won the University's own Business Ideas Competition, BULB, where her idea triumphed in a field of nearly 50 entries. Now Angela has been accepted into the SPEED scheme, where she will receive a further £4,500 of financial support and a package of business support including mentoring, training and use of the University's student business incubator space.

Angela says, 'Precious metals are finite resources and managing these is going to become an ever increasing challenge as we move into the 21st Century. I am delighted to have been given the chance to participate in the SPEED programme and explore an idea which combines sustainability and resource management with established practical engineering techniques. Hopefully I can put the training I receive to good use by making a success of 'Roads to Riches'. A number of companies have shown interest in the idea and are considering trialling the technology – ideally I would like to see it sweeping into Birmingham in the not too distant future.'

Ends

Notes to Editors

1. Angela Murray has also won the International Precious Metal Institute (IPMI) Graduate Student Award 2008. This award is made annually to a student conducting research and development in the field of precious metals. It has not been awarded at a British University for over 20 years. The has been awarded \$5000 prize, which will be presented to her at the 32nd International Precious Metal Conference in Phoenix, Arizona this month.
2. BizCom is a competition organised by the Mercia Enterprise Group, a collaboration of West Midlands universities committed to developing student enterprise.
3. SPEED is a national programme running at 13 universities to enable students with business ideas to develop the skills and knowledge they will need to develop these from concept through to fully functioning companies. During 2006-8 the University of Birmingham has awarded 60 SPEED placements to its students. Places are competitive and are awarded based on the strength of the business idea and the potential of the individual as an entrepreneur.

For further media information

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