

After winning campus pitch contest, national competition next for student-run Party.0

by Kristin Stockheimer - Monday, December 23, 2013

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Pitch an idea in 90 seconds, and then it is up to the judges to decide.

At the 3rd annual Collegiate Entrepreneur Organization (CEO) Pitch Conference, held in early December, 10 University of Wisconsin Oshkosh students presented their ideas for a chance to win \$1,000 in a *Shark Tank*-like competition.

The panel of judges consisted of successful entrepreneurs: Jordan Rhodes, Geof White, Ian Abston, Alex Fehrenbach and Jeff Beischel. They had a difficult time deciding who the winner would be but ultimately made their choice.

Jake White, pitching his already successful [Party.0](#), earned first place, followed by second place finisher Kris Lefeber, whose grocery app concept earned \$200. Alex Flanagan's human resources consulting pitch earned third place, earning a \$50 prize.

White, along with his business partner Steven Vanevenhoven, started Party.0 in 2012. The duo wanted to have fun without drinking, so they formed self-sustaining late night sober parties. White was surprised at how easy it was to get it started. The business continues to draw attention and support.

“At the local level it was really easy, people came on board right away,” White said. “So, with that, it was important to not stay stagnant and keep making it bigger. I want to spread it to other schools and not just be a student who did this thing to market it.”

And before they knew it, Party.0 blew up and was soon the center of conversation for students. The parties started to get more elaborate with the help of local businesses like Papa John's and Eat Street, which started donating food and the DJ talent source providing the events' music.

Throughout the process, White turned to his mentors Chelsea Redger, the program adviser of Reeve Union Board, and Paula Brusky, music business professor. He understood the importance of meeting with them and learning all the he could. Redger said she found it a privilege to be able to advise White.

“Jake is one of the most genuine, inclusive and caring individuals that I know,” Redger said. “Certainly, he is one of the most dynamic students I have ever worked with and his dedication to his passions makes him a trendsetter and a leader. Jake truly cares about others, the mission of Party.0 and about connecting people in a fun and inclusive way.”

Now with the \$1,000, the next step for White is to develop a clear and professional video for Party.0 to use to explain why to hire him and teach other universities how to run the program.

White also received \$500 from investor Dave Balter, who attended the CEO Webinar and chose two CEO members for their business ideas for additional prize money, so White can use this money to work on the video as well.

Currently, he is researching who to hire and preparing to enter the United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (USASBE) Launch in Florida over spring break, where he will compete for \$10,000 in a similar competition to the CEO Pitch Competition.

With White's goal of moving Party.0 to other schools, he put Chris Schierl and Joe Sobraliski in charge at UW Oshkosh. White said both are passionate about the business, and he thinks they are going to take it farther than he took it.

"I read about Party.0 when I was in high school, and I never knew that I would actually meet Jake," said nursing major freshman Schierl. "Now being a part of it I have gotten involved as possible. I'm super pumped to expand it and would love to be a part of it all the years I'm at UW Oshkosh."

Even though Schierl is helping take the reins of an existing venture, he still considers himself an entrepreneur. He still looks up to White, following his successful lead. White hopes his example of resilience rubs off.

"You need to be able to ask a lot of questions and get thorough feedback," he said. "Saying 'we're doing to it' was what pushed me forward. You also need to have a passion that is unwavering and a belief in what you're doing, which is the most important part for an entrepreneur to become successful."