

2006-2007 McCloskey Business Plan Competition Winner “SolarShade” Wins Collegiate Idol Competition



Successes Continue for Team SolarShade As They Win Inaugural Collegiate Idol Competition

[Read about SolarShade's Collegiate Idol Success in the Indianapolis Star](#)

An aftermarket product that transforms an ordinary window into an energy-efficient window won top honors for Team SolarShade in the McCloskey Business Plan Competition in April of 2007. Successes continue to roll for SolarShade as they gathered state-wide recognition and top honors recently in the Indiana Collegiate Idol Competition which was held on November 8 in Indianapolis.

SolarShade earned grand prize honors and \$10,000 as winners of this inaugural state-wide event. This is the third in a string of successes for the team. SolarShade was also awarded a \$14,500 grant from the National Collegiate Inventors and Innovators Alliance last summer. The monies will be used to further develop the patent and research.

Team SolarShade is comprised of University of Notre Dame Students Will McLeod (BS '08 with a dual Degree in Mechanical Engineering and Industrial Design), Ryan Tatzel (BS '09, majoring in Chemical Engineering), Danielle Truskowski (BBA '08, majoring in Marketing and Theatre Studies) and Michael Stacey (MBA '07). They have designed a technology which transforms windows, skylights or panes into "smart windows:" a window enhanced with SolarShade can tint from clear to dark at the push of a button.

“The Gigot Center is proud of the accomplishments of these students who took advantage of every opportunity we offered to gain valuable education, mentorship and assistance throughout their entrepreneurial journey,” noted Jim Davis, Director of the Gigot Center. “...They were present at virtually every training session we sponsored, capitalized on the willingness of assigned mentors to work with them, and worked very hard to hone their presentation and their business over the past year.”

Collegiate Idol is a unique state-sponsored competition enabling entrepreneurship students to showcase their product/service, market opportunity and passion before a live audience of Angel investors, venture capitalists and entrepreneurs in order to compete for the grand prize of \$10,000. The fast-paced, "American Idol"-like competition gave teams a chance to get exposure, find financial backers and ultimately help bring new ideas to market. "This is real business . . . with real money on the line," said Bruce Kidd, director of small business and entrepreneurship for the Indiana Economic Development Corp.

Their competition included teams from Indiana University, Purdue and other universities from throughout the entire state of Indiana. Five judges peppered representatives of each company with questions about the practicality and commercial appeal of each invention. Approximately 200 people in the audience at the Indiana Convention Center then cast electronic votes from their seats.

"The competition was bigger and stronger than we expected," McLeod said. "It was really exciting to discover that everything we've been trained in and taught inside the Notre Dame bubble held up so well in the real world." Mike Stacey went on to add that, "Our preparations for the McCloskey finals paid off in this event, as there were no questions that we haven't already faced or anticipated. Our elevator pitch was natural, convincing, and most importantly related to a problem that everyone can understand. Our differentiator was not the depth of our technical knowledge, but a very realistic view of what it will take to get our product to market, as well as how this "idea" can become a viable business."

Indiana Collegiate Idol was co-sponsored by the Indiana Economic Development Corporation and TechPoint as a part of Indiana Entrepreneurship Week. According to the Indianapolis Star, "the day's real winner is the state's economy because small companies and independent entrepreneurs are just as crucial to the state's future as the big companies that are also patent powerhouses, such as Eli Lilly and Co., Delphi Technologies and Cummins."

Stacey credits Gigot Center involvement as a key to the on-going success of Team SolarShade. "The biggest contributor to our success has been access to the *IrishAngels* network for advice and feedback. Our plan had gone through several iterations before it became 'winning material.' The formal mentoring as well as informal discussions with judges and training sessions helped us to realign our approach and uncover unforeseen obstacles." From his Gigot Center summer internship in Cape Town, South Africa (working with an organization that seeds entrepreneurship in local communities) to his presence on two top McCloskey Business Plan Competition teams (with SolarShade in '07 and as a finalist the year before), Stacey acknowledges Gigot Center programs and training as an essential part of his Notre Dame entrepreneurial experience. "I am very thankful for the offerings of the Gigot center and the role they continue to play in providing a great learning opportunity for those that have entrepreneurship in their DNA."

From the entire team at the Gigot Center our heartiest congratulations to Team SolarShade for their recent successes!