

Incubating Success

Young entrepreneurs find the UI campus is the ideal place to grow their businesses.

BY BETSY HICKOK, 90MFA

UI student Jared Garfield came home late again on a recent Friday night—but he wasn't out celebrating the end of a week of classes, like most other college students.

The 22-year-old was working hard on the business he's launched. "For about a year now, my partner and I have put in 70- to 80-hour weeks—there are days when we don't even eat," he says.

Garfield is a student in the UI John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center (JPEC), a unique partnership within the UI among the Henry B. Tippie College of Business, College of Engineering, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and UI Health Sciences that was founded in 1996 through a gift from John and Mary Pappajohn of Des Moines. JPEC enables students to pursue a certificate in entrepreneurial management in addition to their primary degree, which might be in anything from engineering to health care to the performing arts.

A lucky few of these students who feel that their business plans are ready for the "real world" are selected each year to participate in the Bedell Entrepreneurship Learning Lab (BELL). Established in 2004—with a generous gift commitment of \$660,000 from Tom Bedell—to serve as an "incubator" for student-led businesses, the BELL is just one example of many programs across the University of Iowa campus that provide invaluable

Jared Garfield



PHOTO: TOM LANGDON/ UI FOUNDATION

learning opportunities beyond the classroom.

Housed in a former fraternity house on North Clinton Street, the BELL offers 17 fully equipped offices with computers, high-speed Internet access, a conference room, and two large meeting spaces. Potential BELL participants must submit a business plan and an explanation of how having the office will benefit them. Once accepted, they meet weekly with Lynn Jahn, 86BS, 97MBA, managing director of the BELL, who has an extensive background in business and entrepreneurship. The students work independently, but Jahn—as well as David Hensley, 86BS, executive director and clinical professor of JPEC, and other faculty members—help track progress and provide solutions to challenges encountered along the way.

Garfield, whose hometown is

SUPPORTING SUCCESS

Spirit Lake native Tom Bedell earned an undergraduate degree from Stanford University in 1973 and then attended the UI College of Law. He left law school to head a consulting firm in Washington, DC, where his late father, former U.S. Representative Berkley Bedell, was serving in Congress. In 1979, the son took over as president of what was then Berkley & Company, the fishing-tackle company that his father founded as Berkley Fly Company in 1937. The company was renamed Pure Fishing in 1998 and became the world's leading fishing-tackle company, with manufacturing and marketing facilities in 22 countries. Pure Fishing was sold to the Jarden Corporation in 2007; Bedell retired in early 2008.

A frequent visitor and speaker at BELL, JPEC, and the Tippie College of Business, Bedell says, "These days, what I'm finding most enjoyable is sharing what I've learned about entrepreneurship with young people who are eager to grow the next generation of dynamic, global companies right here in Iowa."

Bedell is continuing a strong tradition of support from successful entrepreneurs with deep Iowa roots—including John Pappajohn, 52BSC, Henry Tippie, 49BSC, and Marvin Pomerantz, 52BSC, among others—for UI students who will become the innovative business leaders of tomorrow.

Deerfield, Illinois, and his business partner, John Slump, from Sioux City, are among the fortunate students inhabiting a BELL office. Garfield describes their business, J & J Solutions, as "a medical-device manufacturing firm that provides a revolutionary approach to handling hazardous drugs in the health industry."

Neither partner has a background in pharmacy or engineering—Garfield is a business major and Slump graduated in 2008 with a degree in finance. The concept occurred to them when a family member was being treated for cancer.

The two researched everything they could about handling hazardous drugs and the governmental mandates that regulate the process, and then began brainstorming a better solution. "I do the design end of our business," says Garfield. "My grandfather is an engineer, and I guess I inherited his creativity."

Slump focuses on finances. "We've been traveling a lot to meet with potential investors and compete in national business plan competitions," says Garfield. J & J Solutions took first place in the Pappajohn New Venture Business Plan Competition for Iowa students and has placed in several national student business competitions.

Another BELL participant, Nathan Drew, a UI graduate from Des Moines, is breaking ground for a completely different type of business. His company, Drew Holdings, Inc. (DHI), provides transitional housing for senior citizens in rural communities.

"DHI offers attractive living space for active seniors who wish to remain independent, but want to downsize," says Drew, who completed a UI degree in marketing in 2008. "As a side benefit, this makes more family-size homes available for younger people. We often talk about the 'brain drain' in Iowa, and this scenario can provide another incentive for young professionals to remain in the state."

The floor plans for the 500- to-1,000-square-foot homes that Drew is building have an interesting history. Following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, a group of high-end New York architects had the idea to design compact, high-quality homes that could be built inexpensively with FEMA funds to provide a dignified alternative to trailers as accommodations for storm victims. Only about 2,100 Katrina Cottages have been built for that purpose due to zoning and other issues, but people in other circles have recognized the possibility of a broader market for

the homes—and the plans were recently purchased by Lowe's, the national chain of home-improvement stores.

"When I went to see some of these cottages in Gulfport, I was completely impressed," says Drew. "Then I thought about their potential for providing high-quality but affordable

living here in Iowa, and I started looking into governmental programs that support home loans for modest-income residents, including older citizens."

The UI student met with executives at Lowe's corporate headquarters in North Carolina, who gave him permission to use the plans provided he uses Lowe's materials. In spring of 2008, Drew broke ground for the first DHI Independence Cottage in Colfax, where he is working with a developer who has taken an interest in the project. He says, "I'm confident that this business will take off, but I appreciate his support—after all, you can't put that much stock in a 22-year-old from Des Moines until you begin to see results."

The students are quick to mention that BELL—and its benefactor, Tom Bedell—have played a crucial role in their UI education. "The BELL enables us to learn in a way we could never experience in a classroom," says Drew. "This just can't be taught—you're actually doing it."

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Nathan Drew