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MEDIA RELEASE

Aspiring idea tops Opportunity fest

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An idea aimed at providing meaningful employment opportunities for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was the big winner at the inaugural Opportunity Fest held at Simon Fraser University's Surrey campus on April 7.

Dubbed "Aspire", a team of undergraduate students from the Beedie School of Business – Alice Chen, Matt Armstrong, Joanne Chen, Robbie Hsieh and Justin Findley – developed the plan to leverage the characteristics of autism as a competitive advantage in the software testing industry, while creating a suitable and nurturing work environment for the unique differences of those with ASD.

The student entrepreneurs were among 50 who showcased their class-produced ventures to the wider business community in a market-style exhibition while a panel of judges reviewed the projects and presentations.

Second place went to Ratemylot.com, which helps motorists find safe, convenient, and clean parking lots by drawing on statistics from parking lot locations, prices, break-ins, and consumer feedback. Developers include students Stewart Wilkinson, Jessie Mann, Carrie Tsang, Ken Forsyth, Aman Deol, and Jenny Wu.

Finishing third was Bloggle, a dual-pane ski/snowboarding goggle specially designed by students as a combination between traditional goggles and a Bluetooth headset, enabling users to answer and end phone calls, voice dial, and listen to music freely while playing on the mountain. Student developers are Camy Wong, Mandeep Barn, Maggie Lo, Victor He, and Will Wu.

Meanwhile, students Terrence Lee and Louise Khanjian were honoured as Mr. and Ms. Opportunity. The award recognizes a male and female exhibitor who best engaged the event judges from industry and academia in presenting their team's opportunity.

"In today's inter-connected world, where things are happening so rapidly and your plans are outdated as soon as they are established, success and growth depends on your ability to continuously identify and pursue opportunities," says Eric Gedajlovic, a professor at SFU's Beedie School of Business, which sponsored the event. "Students here have shown they can go far simply by working with the ideas they are passionate about."

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