

Neeley In the News September 2014



September 5, 2014

BNSF Next Generation Leadership Program: 'The leaders of tomorrow' - by Shelby Frazier

First-year students are able to vie for a place in the Neeley School of Business' leadership program as it expands its reach.

The BNSF Next Generation Leadership Program, which is a part of the Neeley School of Business, helps students develop the leadership skills that will propel them to succeed in and out of the work environment, said Kirsten Fishel, director of the program.

Activities include practice on addressing conflict with peer-on-peer exercises and mock scenarios where they must tackle stressful situations.

Fishel said the organization's goal is to give students a well-rounded perspective on what companies expect of leaders.

Next Gen was launched in 2006 as a four-semester program. In 2013 the organization began allowing sophomores to join, making it a six-semester program. First-year students now have the opportunity to apply to the program during the spring semester.

Senior accounting major Lindsey Backlund said the structured application process has a lot of steps, but the program's benefits are vast.

"Next Gen hasn't just taught me how to be a leader, it has nurtured me to be the best version of myself that I can be, not only in the workforce but in all areas of my life," said Backlund.

First-year students wanting to apply to the program must earn at least a 3.0 GPA in their fall semester and also provide letters of recommendation. If selected for the next round, each student must then go through a one-on-one interview with the application committee. Finally, the committee selects between 30-32 students to be members of the BNSF Next Generation Leadership Program for the upcoming school year.



Senior accounting major Lindsey Backlund and O. Homer Erektion, dean of the Neeley School of Business, at the Next Gen kickoff dinner, Thursday Aug. 28. (TCU 360/ Sally Wang)



September 13, 2014

Students to 'collide' in new Hays Business Commons - by Richard Escobedo

Business students will get the chance to "collide" with one another and develop new business ventures in the recently announced Spencer and Marlene Hays Business Commons.

The aim is to create a place where students will not just come to class, but come to work, said John V. Roach Dean of the Neeley School of Business O. Homer Erektion.

"It will have a place for them to explore entrepreneurial ideas to work on starting new ventures and for a place to incubate those new ventures," Erektion said.

Those places, Erektion says, are called collision zones.

The \$100 million undertaking, the largest academic construction project in TCU history, will be completed in two phases. Phase one will add new east and south wings, in addition to an office complex. A new auditorium is also slated for construction.

Phase two will see renovations come to Tandy Hall and Smith Hall. However, plans call for the demolition of one building: Dan Rogers Hall. A new facility – likely the auditorium and office complex – will go in its place. That new building will connect to Tandy Hall and, via an elevated structure to be completed in Phase 1, Smith Hall.

Erekson admits it's a bold project, but he already has the support of one prominent TCU couple.

Spencer Hays and his wife Marlene are donating an initial \$30 million toward the construction of the Business Commons.

This isn't the couple's first donation to TCU, but it is their largest.

In a press release, the Hays' said they are excited to help build the future of TCU.

Erekson is hoping to do the same. He says he wants to continue building the Neeley School into something unique, where strong faculty-student interactions are a defining factor.

"I have a passion for making a difference for our students, for TCU and for our Fort Worth community and well beyond," said Erekson.



September 19, 2014

TCU undergrad entrepreneurship program ranked in top 25

Texas Christian University's undergraduate entrepreneurship program was ranked No. 20 out of more than 2,000 surveyed by The Princeton Review in 2014.

This is the fourth year that TCU has ranked in the top 25 for entrepreneurship studies. Babson University is ranked No. 1, the University of Houston was No. 2, Baylor University was No. 3 and the University of Oklahoma is ranked No. 5.

"Innovation is key to all that we do in the Neeley School of Business at TCU," O. Homer Erekson, the John V. Roach Dean of the Neeley School, said. "In our entrepreneurship program, we couple that with a values-centered approach, best exemplified by the Richards Barrentine Values and Ventures® Business Plan Competition. We validate the premise that students can start a prosperous business and make meaningful contributions at the same time."

The Princeton Review asked university administrators 60 questions covering level of commitment to entrepreneurship inside and outside the classroom; percentage of faculty, students and alumni actively and successfully involved in entrepreneurial endeavors; and the number and reach of mentorship programs. The company also asked schools about scholarships and grants for entrepreneurial studies, and support for school-sponsored business plan competitions.

See the complete list at www.princetonreview.com/entrepreneur. The feature article on the rankings will be in the October issue of Entrepreneur, available on newsstands Sept. 23.

September 19, 2014

Restaurant to retail: Entrepreneur builds online market for chefs and restaurants - by Betty Dillard

Like any true entrepreneur, Tanner Agar, a young chef and innovator with a love for great food, turned an idea into a successful startup, a business undertaking that feeds a need in the food service industry.

His company, The Chef Shelf, is an online retailer of specialty foods and chef/restaurant branded products. The Chef Shelf sells and ships everything from soup to nuts domestically and internationally from its headquarters in Fort Worth. It also posts recipes and chef videos and shares tidbits about cooking, the culinary scene and its chef/restaurant partners.

Started barely a year ago, in October 2013, the business already boasts more than 22 partners, steady growth in sales and a national award for its founder.

Not bad for a freshman venture and even more impressive because its 22-year-old CEO is a full-time entrepreneur student at Texas Christian University's Neeley School of Business.

"I started the company out of a passion for chefs and food and the belief that we could create a platform that engaged our customers and helped chefs," Agar said. "Our mission is to serve our customers the highest quality packaged foods available in order to challenge their palates and improve home dining while promoting and expanding the reach of our chef and restaurant partners. We're helping spread the word about their products and their restaurants. We're maximizing their brand and increasing their customer base. We're really about the restaurants."

Agar has always wanted to cook. When he was a kid, he'd whip up creative homemade concoctions. "The chili chocolate pie I made in the fourth grade was the worst thing ever," he admitted.

His family moved often – his father is a broadcaster – and Agar landed his first job at 15 working as a pizza cook in Chicago, delivering the pies by Segway.

He eventually became a chef and server at restaurants across the United States, Canada and Spain.

"I thought I would work in a kitchen and become a great chef. I would learn how to run a business and once I graduated I would be ready to build my little empire," he said.

While working as a chef, Agar noticed that many chefs – aside from the Wolfgangs, Marios, Emerils and Guys – who have developed food and kitchen products, cookbooks and recipes have little time and/or money to effectively market their brands. He also saw how competitive shelf space is in stores. The biggest challenge facing chefs, he says, is that branding takes time away from cooking, managing and handling daily operations.

The idea behind The Chef Shelf is to work with chefs to help them understand the packaged food market and tailor their recipes for home consumption. The products are all real recipes made in a chef's own kitchen. The Chef Shelf then sells the products beyond the restaurant doors straight to customers' doors. Chefs don't break their budgets or invest too much of their time. For chefs, it's icing on the cake.

"When I started working I realized you needed to brand yourself. It's a very effective way to increase your business," Agar said. "I looked at it and said when I'm a chef I'll make sure I've got a strong brand of products.

At one point I made the shift and decided I could be the guy to market other chefs' products."

Agar, who will graduate in December, came to TCU specifically for an entrepreneurship education. As a member of TCU's CEO (Collegiate Entrepreneurs' Organization) club, an extracurricular activity that gives students a taste of entrepreneurship, he's surrounded himself with students who want to start their own companies while partnering with professionals in the entrepreneurship center.

"The university has been incredibly helpful – the people especially. I could not afford to pay for any advice that I have almost on tap," he said.



Last fall, while developing his website, Agar won \$1,500 and third place out of 60 competitors in the national Elevator Pitch Competition sponsored by CEO in Chicago. Agar had won first place at TCU, which earned him a spot in the national contest.

"If I show up with an idea I might win. If I show up with a launched website I have a pretty good chance. So I scrambled to get everything done. I left for Chicago to compete the next day after launching the site," Agar said. "I knew that was the opportunity to introduce my brand."

The website carries products from a battery of renowned chefs and restaurants, including Reata Restaurant, Enchiladas Ole!, Risky's BBQ, chef Kent Rathburn, Sevy's Grill in Dallas, chef Dean Fearing from the Ritz Carlton in Dallas, Lambert's Downtown BBQ in Austin and Perini Ranch. Chef Jon Bonnell of Bonnell's Fine Texas Cuisine and Waters Coastal Cuisine was the first partner to sign on.

"Chefs have said they signed with us because they see we're food people. We get it. That's why we created the blog and have recipes and chef videos," Agar said. "I love sharing food. It's a way customers can go to different chefs and try their products and recipes. We've got incredible products and customers love them. These products represent the chefs, their restaurant, their name."

Agar said one of the ingredients in his success is that the platform is content-focused, featuring the videos, blogspot and Instagram.

"It's an effective way for us to advertise. We tell people the stories. The chefs tell their own stories. Our goal is to make this as easy for the chefs as possible and free for them," he said. "My favorite part is to write checks to the chefs. It's saying, 'Your company is awesome and people are buying your product and are loving it.'"

Chef Molly McCook at Ellerbe Fine Foods in Fort Worth is one of the latest awarded-winning chefs to sign on. Customers can find her sea salt and spice blend for sale on The Chef Shelf.

Agar worked at Ellerbe for about two years, starting in the kitchen and finishing as a server.

"I remember first interviewing Tanner on how eager he was, wanting to get involved in the service and food industry and wanting to learn all sides of the business," said Richard King, co-owner at Ellerbe Fine Foods. "He has a dedicated strong work ethic with a passion for this industry that always showed as an employee here. Tanner has an intense charisma about him that you know he will get the job done, and you can truly see that when it comes to his startup company. Chef Shelf is an easy way to get a couple of our 'dry good' products out there in a relatively simple manner. He makes it easy for restaurants or food vendors to give it a shot with very low risk and not much effort on their end.

"This is already a risky, low-profit business," King added, "so I love to see people like Tanner helping restaurants get our name out there more, make a little money and [be] willing to work with us to be a partnership."

Until he graduates, Agar is still learning to balance his business life and the demands of school. All profits are being put back into the business. He hopes to add a second full-time employee before the holidays and to bring on some investors soon, "but for right now the Bank of Tanner has been our sole provider," he said.

"People really believe in the chefs. And when they believe in the chefs they believe in the platform," he said. "It's an honor that people trust in our brand. We have a lot of pride in that and we take a lot of care with our chefs and with their customers. There's a reason to buy these products. I'm happy to help these people sell their products."