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Green entrepreneurial ideas highlight annual celebration

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BURLINGTON - Brian Peters is now \$1,000 closer to launching a new business based on his own all-natural salsa.

Peters, 44, of Pleasant Prairie was the winner from among five finalists Wednesday in the Launching Green Businesses competition. The judging took place at Veterans Terrace, 589 Milwaukee Ave. here Wednesday afternoon at Racine County Economic Development Corp.'s 27th anniversary celebration.

The competition emerged from a January entrepreneurial green business conference at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, which about 120 people attended.

About 25 people entered business ideas to win a free business start-up course. Thirteen are now enrolled, and the five finalists were chosen from that class to compete Wednesday at the RCEDC event.

Peters lost his job in the construction industry in late 2008 and is still unemployed. But through the start-up course he has formed Peters Family Kitchens.

He told judges his salsa will be a high-end product that will sell for about 20 percent more than current mass-produced brands.

His \$1,000 prize must be put toward launching the business. Three-fourths of the money came from the state Department of Commerce and \$250 from the Racine County Workforce Development Center.

Matt Wagner, UW-Parkside Small Business Development Center executive director, said the goal of Launching Green Businesses is to attract people with good ideas to this area to start their companies.

"It's a new form of business attraction called 'talent attraction,'" he told Wednesday's audience.

"While the (entrepreneurs) could be located anywhere, only Racine County was able to provide this process, services, etc. which now has gained their commitment to launch their new businesses here," he said.

Wagner said it's a highly cost-efficient tool, projected to cost less than \$500 per job created.

"It's sort of like recruiting a business," he said, "but in this case it takes a lot less of local resources (for example a class, some counseling and connections) to entice an individual with some talent to start a business in Racine County."

The other contestants and their ideas:

- Ellen Ferwerda, 47, of Kenosha - An indoor home composting system.
- Raymond Madden, 50, of Antioch, Ill. - Refurbishing and reselling used computers.
- Jim Nondorf, 45, of Racine - A reverse osmosis system for making boilers more efficient.
- Norm Walker, 48, of Racine - A service to identify and address air leaks in manufacturers' compressed-air systems.