November 27, 2017

Lending a hand to warm hands

Edmonton – Lindsay Penny admits she was a bit hesitant when she heard that she would be teaming up with four other students in her BUSN 201 course to come up with an idea to create a business and raise money for charity.

Penny, Rikkea Roberge, Vanessa Gomez, Britney Blomquist and Mary Douglas—all students in the Public Relations program at MacEwan University—were provided a $25 startup loan to start a business and raise money for charity. After brainstorming several ideas, the group decided to go to a thrift store and scoured the racks for sweaters.

“All I could think about was getting it over with and ending up with some money to donate to charity,” said Penny. “It’s amazing how quickly that changed.” The old sweaters were turned into mittens in their upcycling venture and they called their product Thrifty Mitties. In a short while the group had turned their $25 startup loan into 16 pairs of mittens that they sold in October.

The students used Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to get their message out about selling the mittens. “We were so excited,” says Gomez. “We sold everything we had at the marketplace.” The excitement—and the work—didn’t stop there. Instead, the students continued searching their own closets—and those of family and friends—for more sweaters they could upcycle.

“We’re turning sweaters that nobody wants anymore into mittens that are keeping people warm,” adds Penny. “Everything about that feels so good. I never imagined I would feel this way about a school project.”

The team will be sewing and selling mittens until the last day of classes, when they’ll tally their profits and get ready to present the funds—and a batch of mittens—to Boyle Street Community Services. “This is a product and an idea that is viable, and something we are really proud of,” said Penny.

“We’re finding that students are getting very creative in their startups,” says Keltie Gower. She coordinates the BUSN 201 Mission Possible assignment—now in its fifth year. “The range of products that students are coming up with is getting more diverse, and the students are connecting more and more with the community.”

The Thrifty Mitties team members all agree that their social entrepreneurship venture may have a future outside of the classroom. “There’s a special bond that happens when you get together to sew mittens for a worthy cause,” says Blomquist. “This feels like the kind of experience that builds lifelong friendships.”

Founded in 1971, MacEwan University inspires its students with a powerful combination of academic excellence and personal learning experiences. Offering more than 65 programs including undergraduate degrees, applied degrees, diplomas, certificates, continuing education and corporate training, the university provides a transformative education in a creative, collaborative and supportive learning environment where creativity and innovation thrive. Located in Edmonton, Alberta Canada, MacEwan University offers a unique student experience that opens up diverse pathways for achievement and growth.

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