

Local News

Will anti-fat business plan be a winner?

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By Jeff Kiger

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Is a business based on Mayo Clinic research about fighting obesity a winning concept?

That's what Dr. James Levine and John Montague will find out Thursday when the Minnesota Cup competition announces which of five finalist companies will be named the most innovative idea. Their Mayo Clinic-supported company, Muve Inc., made it to the top five out of 500 applicants.

"We're providing a solution that truly has never existed before," said Montague, Muve's CEO. "This is all about creating a major change in people's lifestyles. We hope that we can start a true movement, a worldwide movement."

Muve builds on research by Levine that found today's sedentary lifestyle is the cause of the obesity epidemic and incorporating more motion -- like walking on a treadmill at your desk -- on a daily basis can counteract that.

The key is to know how much you are moving. To do that, Muve, with Mayo Clinic, has created a small digital device called Gruve to record and measure every movement a person makes throughout the day. That means while typing on a keyboard, walking to get coffee or folding laundry, the amount of calories being burned will be tallied.

Software will keep you updated on how many calories you have burned versus how many you've consumed. Online communities called "Movements" will link Gruve users together for support and advice.

Comparing the Gruve device to a car's gas gauge or a mobile phone's battery meter, Montague said it gives people a clear understanding of what is going on in their own body.

The Gruve device and the Movement online communities are just the start. Treadmill desks, a fitness book, clothing, branded bottled water, nutritional supplements and health consulting are also part of the vision.

Why is this concept among the five finalists in the annual Minnesota entrepreneur competition?

"They wrote a great business plan with a really compelling idea," said Minnesota Cup co-founder Scott Litman. "And they showed that they have a team in place that can make this work."

Last year, a similar idea proposed by Levine made it to the semi-finalist level. By pulling together a strong team that could make the plan a reality, "They went from a good semi-finalist to great finalist," said Litman.

If chosen as the top business, Muve will win \$25,000 in seed capital and advice from leaders in finance, accounting, legal and management support services.

A 15-minute presentation Thursday afternoon will be the final chance the five companies have to pitch their proposal to the judges. By 7 p.m., a winner will be chosen.

Win or not, Muve will move forward. Montague plans to open an office in Minneapolis on Oct. 1. Trials of the products will be conducted in the third quarter of 2008 with a commercial launch between the first and second quarters of 2009.

And then the duo hopes the "movement" will truly begin.

"This company will precipitate a global movement to health that has never been seen and is desperately needed," stated Levin in Muve's business plan.

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