
Young, ambitious and ready to light up the world

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AFTON - For the past two years an Afton man has been working to bring a more efficient and safer form of electricity to a corner of the world that still uses kerosene as its primary source of light.

Patrick Delaney, who grew up in Afton and attended Stillwater Junior High, is the founder of Bright New Ideas, a nonprofit whose mission is to create low-cost solar lanterns for rural families in Nicaragua.

"More than two billion people in the world have no access to electricity," Delaney said Thursday evening.

Delaney, who graduated from the University of Minnesota with an electrical engineering degree in May, created a lamp for his senior engineering project, which uses tiny, inexpensive solar photovoltaic panels to charge small batteries which power highly efficient LEDs for use at night.

Soon, his class project morphed into a nonprofit that has been a trailblazer in utilizing the technology to help underprivileged areas of the world.

"I want the nonprofit to continue to focus on education," he said.

For his efforts, Delaney was invited to spend six months in India to work for a Stanford University-founded startup company, for which he made first-hand assessments of energy needs and worked alongside solar lamp associations based in Kenya and Tanzania.

As a result, he came to the realization that assembling solar lamps with the collaboration of a local partner is the most cost-effective and sustainable way to give people access to light.

Bright New Ideas soon partnered with AVODEC, a nonprofit grass-roots organization in Nicaragua, to bring his lanterns to rural communities.

This year, Bright New Ideas and AVODEC intend to distribute 100 lamps and generate feedback from the users on reliability before moving forward.

Thus far, reaction has been positive, Delaney said.

"The response was overwhelming," he said. "People really, really wanted them."

He explained Nicaragua gets dark by 6 p.m. because of its proximity to the equator. Without light, many people just go to bed because they have no light to get work done.

"Using kerosene isn't ideal because it creates harmful fumes and is becoming expensive," he said.

Delaney said renewable lighting will enable families to continue their farm work and allow children to do schoolwork - key elements for economic growth.

He now has a lofty goal to bring 10,000 lamps to Nicaragua by 2009.

Delaney is in the process of raising \$5,000 to cover the costs of purchasing materials and collecting data for the 100 families who are currently using his lanterns. He isn't sure how much of his own money he has spent on the project.

His efforts to improve the lives of the Nicaraguan people has earned him numerous accolades.

He was a runner-up in the Minnesota Cup, which recognizes young inspiring entrepreneurs, and traveled to China this spring to participate in a Nankai University academic competition.

He received a cash award from the International Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Student Paper Project - which he donated to Bright New Ideas.

Also this spring, he was recognized by the Young Entrepreneurs Talent & Innovation of the Americas Competition, placing among the top 29 out of 854 contestants.

All things considered, Delaney would like to help people domestically as well as globally.

"We have our own energy crisis here in the United States ... I would like to help people here someday," he said.

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