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PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

By Melea Reicks Licht

Undergraduate students are exposed to practical marketing and communication skills in the Iowa State student chapter of the National Agri-Marketing Association (NAMA). Stacey Noe with the Agricultural Entrepreneurship Initiative, and Lori Youngberg, program assistant for the college’s distance programs, advise the group’s 60 students.

“What we do in NAMA is directly applicable to what ag marketing professionals do,” says Noe. “We expose students to marketing and communications careers by bringing in speakers from industry, we take them on agency tours, do service projects and provide networking opportunities that sometimes lead to internships and jobs after graduation.”

The chapter’s marketing team competes against other universities in an annual marketing competition that showcases the talent of Iowa State students on a national stage. The competition gives undergrads a chance to build and practice skills in developing a new product or service, a business plan and pitching their ideas in a formal presentation. Team members also earn three credits in agricultural education and studies.

The Iowa State student chapter earned the John Deere Signature Award for overall points accrued for student participation, involvement in the national competition, scholarship awards and annual report at NAMA’s 2011 annual conference and trade show. Noe also has been recognized nationally by earning the Outstanding Adviser award in 2007 and 2010.

Twice a year students get the chance to quiz agribusiness leaders who have grown their ideas into successful ventures at the Agricultural Entrepreneurs Roundtable Event. Organizers invite a diverse group of entrepreneurs to have dinner and talk with college students. The professionals vary by discipline, age and gender and represent new and established companies.

“The goal is to get students exposed to different forms of opportunity recognition and to learn through the experiences different entrepreneurs had,” says Stacey Noe, Agricultural Entrepreneurship Initiative coordinator.

Harry Stine, president and founder of Stine Seed Co., was the keynote speaker at the spring event in 2010. He was impressed by the group of students at the roundtable.

And while he believes the urge to develop a business is “genetic,” activities like the roundtable are helpful.

“Good coaching will not turn you from a nonathlete into an athlete, but it will enhance you and make you better. The same principle applies here. They can be better business people than they otherwise would be by going to school and being involved in this type of thing,” Stine says.

Getting to network with business people of Stine’s caliber attracts many students, Noe says. She limits participants at each event to about 40 to allow students greater access to the visiting professionals.