

Internet proves to be lucrative link to higher education

By Christine Tatum
College Press Service

Last summer, Stephanie Murg needed money for college. Big money.

She estimated that four years at the University of Rochester in New York would cost around \$112,000. It was a price tag too steep for her parents - especially given that her twin brother was also headed to school.

So Murg, now 19 and majoring in neuroscience, went on an aggressive fishing expedition that, with help from the Internet, brought in enough cash to pay her way through college. Every dime, loan-free. The scholarships and grants she found on the 'net alone totaled more than \$25,000. The rest she's paying with merit-based aid and a few local scholarships.

"I found so much money on the Internet that I was able to study over the summer at Yale and pay for it all," Murg said. "The web is really the way to go nowadays. You just point and click, and you're there."

Experts agree that the Internet is fast becoming the best place for students to find scholarships, grants and low-interest loans. And aside from getting the benefits of efficiency and speed, students don't necessarily have to spend money to find money.

"There's so much information out there that I would never, ever pay someone to find anything for me," Murg said. "All it takes is a little patience and organization."

And a few mouse clicks.

Where do you think you're going? Not very far without a Spring tune-up

By Neil Simon
Campus Correspondent
Northwestern University

Every spring it's the same old scene: Students who left their bicycles outside all winter start riding again as if the snow and sleet that periodically frosted their wheels never fell.

Chains and brakes squeaking, they make their ways through campus hoping the sounds will simply disappear the more they ride.

Bike experts, who do plenty of business this time of year, are already rolling out their annual sermons on maintenance.

"You wouldn't do that to your car," Rob Boi, owner of RRB Bikes in Evanston, Ill., told a student who had left his bike under snow and ice for three months.

"The sun comes out, and everybody wants to get outside," Boi continued, shaking his head. "Let's go have a picnic. Let's go to the beach. Let's ride a bike."

"Their bikes aren't ready."

Water left behind from winter snow and ice can loosen bearings and rust chains, trouble that isn't always obvious before a bike rider gets hurt.

"I was doing a few bunny hops, and (the bike) couldn't take the pressure," said Josh Horton, a sophomore at the University of Oregon, who fell on some pavement last month after riding a bicycle that hadn't been tuned-up in awhile. "The front wheel shot out, and I fell on my face."

Even bikes left indoors can have problems when hitting the road for the first time in a long while.

"My friend thought he had an expensive bike, so he didn't have to maintain it," said Brad Philan, a student at Lane Community College in Oregon. "I rode it the other day, and the gears were grinding and wouldn't shift."

No bicycle, no matter how expensive, is immune from the need for a spring tune-up, Boi said.

"Check the air in the tires, and at least oil the chain. These two things are major," he said. "They'll save a lot of wear and tear on the bike."

Bike shops typically oil chains and pump tires for free - tasks that take

Here, according to experts, are some basics to get you started:

* Know what you can afford. The Financial Aid Information Page, located at www.finaid.org, provides a rich collection of calculators that help students and their parents determine how much in scholarships and loans will be needed to pay education bills. The calculators estimate how much parents are expected to pay under federal guidelines, and will even project how much tuition will cost six years down the road - a feature that's especially handy for students hoping to go to graduate school.

* Get required paperwork out of the way.

Almost all U.S. students applying for need-based aid must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. It's available online through the Education Department's college financing page at www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/index.html. Using FAFSA Express, computer users can file their applications directly to the federal processing center - a task that will shave two weeks off the wait for confirmation that snail-mail users typically endure.

In addition to applications, most scholarship and loan givers require essays, recommendation letters and transcripts. To maximize her time, Murg created a standard essay that she could easily revise to meet a variety of requirements and made sure her letters of recommendation were general enough to "mass produce." She also bought certified copies of her

transcript and stuffed envelopes herself, rather than depending on her school to send the necessary paperwork before a deadline.

"I missed out on one scholarship worth a few thousand dollars because the secretary hadn't gotten around to sending my transcript," Murg said. "Deadlines aren't very flexible. If you miss one, good luck."

* Check out the websites of schools you'd like to attend, and don't let geography limit you.

Colleges and universities nationwide are making greater use of the Internet because they're eager to diversify their student bodies and cut costs associated with postage and data entry. Many schools are posting applications for admission and scholarships that computer users can print, fill out and send back, but some are beginning to ask that students take the time to complete applications online.

It's a type of one-stop shopping that has attracted students who normally wouldn't have thought it possible to attend certain schools, said Frank Granillo, assistant director of scholarships at Arizona State University.

"In the past, students have been prevented from finding out about certain opportunities unless they were physically here, looking through the paperwork," he said. "Now, with the Internet, it doesn't matter if you're in Alaska, Australia, Alabama or Antarctica. You have as good a chance as anyone else."

* Stick with free search services. The industry of finding scholar-

ships and low-interest loans for students is more than two decades old and has provided varying results. The services charge a fee of \$5 to \$150 to supply information directly to students or resellers like colleges and universities. The business has been criticized over the years for charging students for free information.

FastWEB, the first free scholarship tracking service on the Internet, is a good way to sort through the thousands of loans and scholarships that are available and to avoid finders' fees. Its database contains more than 180,000 opportunities to score cash. By going to www.fastweb.com, students can find more than \$45 million in online scholarship applications that can be sent back to money-givers with the click of a mouse.

Within 15 minutes after students complete a detailed personal profile, FastWEB sends them a list of the scholarships for which they're eligible. The service provides updates when new scholarships and grants are added to its database. The service is free because FastWEB accepts online advertising from companies wanting to reach students, such as credit card and telephone companies, and also because it sells - after receiving permission from its customers - information gleaned from student profiles.

Murg said she found out about many of the scholarships she won by using FastWEB.

"When it's time for me to go to graduate school I'll be using them again," she said

Laundry chain is bright idea

Entrepreneurs receive financial backing for coin laundries attached to bars in college towns

By Cheryl Powell
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

KENT, Ohio - All along, four young entrepreneurs have insisted they have a concept that could really clean up in the coin laundry industry.

Now they've finally found an investor who believes them.

Longtime Cleveland businessman Edward Rosenthal agreed recently to help the twentysomethings finance a chain of self-service laundries combined with bars in college towns nationwide.

"I'm impressed with them," said Rosenthal, chairman of Northern Stamping Co. and a minority partner in the New York Yankees. "I think this is going to be a tremendous success if we can build enough of them. It's a great concept."

Rosenthal has agreed to help finance the opening of at least two new stores, which will cost about \$1 million. In exchange, he will retain a 30 percent equity share of the company.

Zach Brandon of Kent, the company's vice president for corporate development, expects each store eventually to post annual revenues of \$500,000 or more.

The original Laundry 101 is in Kent. The first new store is tentatively scheduled to open in Madison, Wis., this summer. If all goes well, the owners would like to open at least four more, mostly in towns with Big Ten Conference universities, by the end of 2000.

"We expect, though, that we'll go much faster than that," said Brandon, 24.

Laundry 101 has been a crash course in business. In 1992, with just \$15,000 among them, childhood friends and recent college graduates Steve McConochy, Justin Clemens and Seth Thoratt started a Kent video store called Video 101.

Back then, Brandon was working his way through his freshman year at Kent State University as the store's video deliverer.

Two years later, 101 Corp. opened a second venture: Laundry 101.

The clean, colorful self-service laundry - also offering snacks, coffee and beer - was an instant hit, particularly with Kent students.

So a year and a half ago, the four decided to try to find an investor who could give them the money they needed to take the concept national.

For months, their expansion efforts seemed to be a wash. "I was at the point of getting real discouraged," said Clemens, 29, Laundry 101's president and chief executive.

Many potential investors dismissed the entrepreneurs because of their youth.

Others were turned off by their in-your-face advertising and marketing strategies, geared at college kids. The prospectus, for example, had Laundry 101's slogan slapped boldly across the front: "You threw up on

yourself last night. Laundry 101. We can help."

"There were probably three or four potential investors who said, 'That has to come off the prospectus. Take the humor out,'" Brandon said. "We knew they wouldn't be our partners."

But after months of networking, they finally met Rosenthal, who was instantly impressed by their enthusiasm and their expertise.

"I think these kids are movers and shakers," Rosenthal said. "They're young, and they're aggressive. I think they're going to go a long way. I can't believe other people couldn't see that."

Eventually the partners want to open about 100 laundry-bars in college towns.

The new stores will be at least 4,500 square feet and will feature study lounges with computers, in addition to bar areas with TVs and music. And, of course, all laundries will have plenty of modern washers and dryers.

The new Laundry 101 near the University of Wisconsin will be 6,000 square feet - "massive," Clemens said proudly, and much larger than the industry average of 2,500 square feet.

With their planned chain of large, modern, self-service laundries, the guys behind Laundry 101 are on the cutting edge of an industry trend.

Several companies, including SpinCycle and Laundromax, have recently launched ambitious plans to open hundreds of coin-operated laundries nationwide, according to the Coin Laundry Association.

Former Cleveland Browns quarterback Bernie Kosar is among the investors in Laundromax, which was formed last month and plans to open more than 400 laundries nationwide within five years.

None of the other chains, however, is geared specifically at college students.

"Certainly college towns have always been favorable demographically to the coin laundry industry," said Brian Wallace, spokesman for the Coin Laundry Association. "They have strong rental housing markets."

Several previous attempts at self-service laundry chains have failed because of lack of controls over money. Laundry 101 plans to counter that problem with computerized machines that use debit cards instead of coins.

Company officials also plan to select new locations that are within a mile of college campuses, something Duds 'N' Suds didn't always do. That chain, which had a concept similar to Laundry 101, failed in the late 1980s.

Rosenthal, a businessman for more than 40 years, is confident his young partners in Laundry 101 have learned how to avoid the mistakes others have made.

"These guys are pretty sharp guys," he said. "You never know where this may lead."

Illinois freshman charged with first degree murder

College Press Service

GALESBURG, Ill. - A Knox College freshman was found with a blood-splattered brick and pair of jeans before he was charged Monday.

Clyde Best, 18, may have used the brick to kill 19-year-old freshman Andrea Racibozynski of Naperville, Ill., over the weekend, said Knox County State Attorney Paul Mangier.

Authorities would not speculate on how the two college students may have known each other.

Best was arrested hours after Racibozynski's body was found on campus Sunday morning. Knox County coroner John Watson said she had suffered extensive head injuries, but the results of an autopsy were not available late Monday afternoon.

Best was ordered held on \$150,000 bond. He is scheduled for a preliminary court hearing April 6.

day with three counts of first-degree murder.

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