

GIVING A HAND TO MICHIGAN'S ECONOMY

BY LAURA WILLIAMS

Students help green-technology firms

Talk about a *power* lunch: A chance meeting between SNRE student Paul Gruber and a local entrepreneur gave birth this spring to a venture development firm whose clients now include a start-up lithium-ion battery company.

The venture firm, Turtlerock Greentech LLC, became a second home this summer to Gruber and three other SNRE students. All are dually enrolled with the Ross School of Business. Their summer internships through the Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise, which manages the three-year, dual-degree program between the schools, gave them invaluable experience with a start-up—and the chance to grow and diversify the state's economy.

"It's an incredibly exciting time," said Gruber, who wants to work with Turtlerock after graduating in the spring of 2010. "It's my dream job."

About 20 Erb students found summer internships this year with Michigan companies and organizations, doing everything from working on the renewal of

Detroit and developing solar technology to making recommendations for pharmaceutical manufacturing.

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For example, while Gruber and others were aiding Turtlerock, SNRE student Alex Linkow worked for the Fair Food Network, a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing healthy, sustainably grown food to communities that do not have access to fresh local produce. While the group plans to expand its work nationally, its efforts to date focus on Detroit.

As part of his internship, Linkow conducted research for a book by Fair Food Network president Oran Hesterman about the domestic food system. "Food systems tie in to environmental and business issues, and the modern U.S. food system has a lot

of negative environmental impacts," Linkow said. "There is the opportunity to design a system that is sustainable. From a business perspective, there are a lot of entrepreneurial opportunities in the food sector, and that business can create positive change."

At Turtlerock, students Bryan Hogle, Imogen Taylor and Nic Wetzler collaborated with Gruber and senior Turtlerock leadership on a variety of items, from reviewing business plans and funding opportunities to writing grants. Gruber met David Han, now managing principal at Turtlerock and a University of Michigan graduate, this spring when seated at the same table during an energy conference hosted on campus.

"We want to contribute right here, right now," Han said of the firm's ambitions. "In Michigan, it's all doom and gloom, but we see lot of opportunity."

While the venture firm specializes in green technologies and sustainable enterprises, its most valuable asset may be its commitment to progress and change. Pursuing "green entrepreneurship" means having an understanding that being successful and making money is not enough, Han said.

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That can-do attitude drove the six members of Turtlerock, including managing partner Scott Phillips, to collaborate with a lithium-ion battery company in writing a multi-million-dollar grant proposal for the U.S. Department of Energy in hopes of winning stimulus dollars to bring the batteries to market.

Many of the Michigan-based students worked with start-up companies, non-governmental organizations or government agencies addressing sustainable business issues. Because those internships do not usually pay wages equal to private-sector internships, the Erb Institute often makes up the difference. "A lot of students who do non-profit or government internships find that the experience shapes their career plans because the work can be so rewarding and have immediate impact," Bunch said.

Nearly 75 students participated in the Erb internship program this summer, working for major corporations such as Ford, DTE, Amazon, Microsoft, Dow and GE; smaller companies such as Honest Tea; and non-profits and NGOs like the Environmental Defense Fund's Climate Corps, Ceres, the Golden Gate National Park Conservancy and the National Resources Defense Council. ♻️



HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION: TURLTEROCK MANAGING PARTNER SCOTT PHILLIPS (FAR LEFT) AND TURLTEROCK MANAGING PRINCIPAL DAVID HAN (SECOND FROM RIGHT) RECEIVED CONTRIBUTIONS THIS SUMMER FROM ERB STUDENTS IMOGEN TAYLOR, NIC WETZLER, BRYAN HOGLE AND PAUL GRUBER.