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Business

Spurring the economy, one Cup at a time

By Jeff Kiger

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It is a long — and sometimes bumpy — path from having an idea to building a successful business.

A statewide competition — the Minnesota Cup — is designed to help people start down that road and give them directions to make the trip less confusing.

"It is about trying to get people off the dime," says Minnesota Cup co-founder Dan Mallin.

Mayo Clinic's Dr. James Levine, who is known for his call for people to move more to combat obesity, was one of the people that the Cup got in motion last year.

He made it to the semifinalist level with his iSlim device, "a validated high-technology device to

promote weight loss."

With Chinmay Manohar, a Mayo research engineer, Levine developed the pedometer-like device. Manohar's design of a new computer chip has brought the cost of the device down to around \$20, Levine said recently.

Mayo's Office of Technology Commercialization patent is pending.

While that idea did not make it in the top six finalists, the strategy is just what Mallin and his co-founder Scott Litman are looking for.

"This is about trying to spur the economy, and we want to do it through intellectual property," Mallin says.

Starting with 650 applicants, a panel of business, government and education leaders select 30 semi-

finalists. Those 30 are winnowed down to five, who then give 15 minute presentations about their ideas.

In 2006, Eden Prairie-based Vast Enterprises won with its paving brick created with recycled materials. The company's organizers took home \$25,000 in seed capital, a year's worth of advisory services from Wells Fargo and business organization services from the Minneapolis-based Maslon.

They also were presented the Minnesota Cup by competition sponsors David and Carolyn Cleveland.

The runner-up gets \$5,000 and Maslon services. The third place winner gets \$2,500.

While the prizes are inspiring,

Checklist

- Interested entrepreneurs can get more information about the Minnesota Cup and enter the contest at www.breakthroughideas.org.
- The deadline is May 25.

Mallin points out the professional guidance and impetus to think through a plan is also valuable for applicants.

"There has to be a winner and finalists, but the ultimate goal is help people grow their businesses ...," he wrote in the competition's promotion materials.