

Local Couple Puts Economic Fuel Winnings to Good Use

By Vivian Dunlap, The Eureka Reporter
2/29/08

Samantha and Greg Hufford are the perfect example of a true success story, reaping the benefits of the local and currently-running Economic Fuel business plan competition. Selected as \$1,000 winners of last year's competition, the young married couple have seen their dreams come to life after a lot of hard work entailing horses, history and babies.

"I was eight months pregnant, so it was kind of strenuous for me" Samantha said of her time in the competition. Their son William is now 8 months old. "It was just a really good experience and really opened my eyes from 'Oh, let's start a business,' to 'Oh my gosh, there is all this stuff you had to do,'" she said.

Starting with only a dream and a love of horses, the two quickly saw their chance to start their guided horseback touring business, Redwood Outfitters, and took it.

"I was driving to work one day and heard a radio ad for the Economic Fuel Competition," Greg said. "My wife has always wanted to have horses since she was a little girl." So the two quickly made the step from dreaming about it, to making it happen.

"The competition got us really planning the whole thing, and really helped to conceptualize all that it would entail," Greg said. A year, one baby and 11 horses later, the couple's business is up and running with a waiting list filling up for summer.

The Economic Fuel: The Humboldt County Student Business Challenge started three years ago as a way to create and encourage entrepreneurial opportunities for local college students and graduates.

The competition features a number of workshops and events designed to help competitors build their business plans, and offers a list of advisors — local business owners and entrepreneurs — to lend advice and expertise to the competitors developing their plans. The contest concludes with over \$100,000 in seed capital being distributed to the teams voted to have the best business plans by a panel of judges. Last year, \$117,000 was distributed amongst eight teams, and the Huffords were one of them.

Their business, based out of Orick, takes groups and individuals on guided trail rides through the Redwood National and State Parks. They

offer three different tours, each packed with its own bit of local history. There is a two-hour ride to the "Goose Pen Tree," a hollowed, burned-out redwood tree named by early settlers who used it as an animal corral; a four-hour "Jedidiah's Foot Steps Tour" which travels the actual path used by 19th century explorer Jedidiah Smith; and a six-hour "Explorer For a Day Tour," that travels to both sites and beyond. The two longer tours include stops at a picnic area for snacks and lunch, as well.

"The winter weather has made it kind of slow," Samantha said, but "there's quite a few reservations for summer already." Among those reservations is a foreign exchange group of 25 people coming to ride in August.

With very little official advertising yet, other than the company's Web site, the couple said they are hopeful that the interest already spurred is a positive sign of things to come.

"With no Web-promoting or advertising, the Web site has had a lot of hits already," Greg said.

The couple's dedication made a lasting impression on Economic Fuel team member Liz Chapman. "Gregory and Samantha had their first baby just after the 2007 competition ended. When we called to congratulate them about a week after the delivery we found out that they were not only doing great, but that Samantha had already been out working with the horses again. When people have that kind of passion and commitment to what they do, you just know they are going to succeed."

"I think the Economic Fuel competition is a wonderful program," Greg said, and Samantha said she has already been contacted by a contestant in this year's competition for advice.

"I told them to shop around, for insurance and stuff. Don't just jump on the first idea you're going to see. There's always going to be a better deal and a better way to do it."

Greg's advice is to seek help from the very people who examine business plans on a regular basis. "I'd tell them to go out and try to find a person in the industry of financing, and have them read over the business proposal because they analyze those all the time."

"And keep your name short so your e-mail address isn't 50 characters long," he laughed.

When not on the back of a horse, Greg is a civil engineer for SHN Consulting's Eureka office. A fifth-generation Orick resident, Greg said his favorite thing about owning his own business is the potential freedom it poses to make and keep the hours of their choosing, while doing something they both enjoy.

As they wait out the winter weather, the couple have found plenty to keep them occupied, from training horses, to raising their son — who, Samantha says will “be on a horse when he turns one. We already have a Shetland pony for him.” Until then, the two will continue to concentrate on their two newest ventures: Redwood Outfitters, and their yet-to-be-named second baby, due in August.

For more information or to book a tour, visit the Web site at www.redwoodoutfitters.com or phone 707-954-8702.