

**Economic Fuel Event to Feature Local Entrepreneurs
by Courtney Hunt-Munther, The Eureka Reporter
3/5/2007**

Four successful North Coast entrepreneurs will gather at Humboldt State University's Kate Buchanan Room Wednesday evening to discuss the challenges and successes they have experienced throughout their careers as local business owners.

Included in the lineup of panelists are Mad River Brewing Co. CEO and President Eric Spieth, Holly Yashi Jewelry co-owner and founder Paul Lubitz, Master-Mind Alliance founder and business consultant Richard Borough, Companion Animal Foundation Thrift Store and Animal Program Center founder/director Kim Class, and C. Crane founder Bob Crane. The four will be on hand from 6:30 to 8 p.m. on Wednesday to speak about their businesses and answer questions from audience members.

The event, which is part of the Economic Fuel student business challenge, is free and open to the public.

Spieth, who served as coordinator for Economic Fuel last year, has served as the CEO and President of Mad River Brewing Co. since last summer. He honed his entrepreneurial skills early on in life as the founder of a startup T-shirt business in high school and then later during his tenure as a coordinator for the 2006 Economic Fuel competition.

Spieth, who holds an MBA from HSU, believes the lessons he learned through starting his own business and building Economic Fuel have helped him in his current position at Mad River Brewing Co., and he credits his successes to the local relationships he formed.

"The reason why I was able to do (this) is because I came into this small community and I went to school here," Spieth said. "I got to know many people. It wasn't my intention to be formally networking, but just through building friendships and getting to know people and meeting people, I think I just fell into the greatest opportunities of my life."

Fellow panelist Paul Lubitz, also a graduate of HSU, was looking for a "real" job after finishing school and fell into a business with a girl he was dating at the time — Holly Hosterman. More than 25 years later,

the pair work side by side as friends and co-owners of Holly Yashi Jewelry.

Lubitz specializes in the industrial technology side of the business, while Hosterman remains the creative genius behind the company's success.

Throughout the years, Holly Yashi has fluidly transitioned with the changing times and even added a Web site last year, which has enjoyed much success, but Lubitz remains concerned about the future of small business on the North Coast.

"We are so isolated as (far) as shopping and trends go," Lubitz said. "The Internet has changed that somewhat, but there is nothing like being there. Also, there is not a community of manufacturers, wholesalers and Web retailers that get together to share learning."

Richard Borough worked as a psychiatrist before opening Master-Mind Alliance as a solution to a growing problem he recognized — business people suffering from work-related stress. The company originated in Palo Alto and Borough opened a branch on the North Coast after moving to Humboldt County.

Most often, Borough counsels entrepreneurs to network, write simple but effective business plans and to not neglect marketing — three critical components of a small business that can lead to stress. Though Borough has not had many problems running a business in a rural community, he believes many local entrepreneurs have trouble finding highly skilled employees to fill specific needs.

Panelist Bob Crane agrees with Borough. The founder of C. Crane, a Fortuna-based company that sells high-end radio and electronics products, Crane believes one of the difficulties associated with running a business in Humboldt County is attracting talent to the area.

After opening a design and woodworking shop in 1976, Crane switched to radio in 1983, filling a niche market for high-end radio products. He believes having a niche is integral for small businesses, particularly for those located on the North Coast.

Another obstacle Crane has had to deal with is shipping costs associated with sending products out of Humboldt County. However, operating a business in a region known for its quality of life is worth it to him.

"Follow your passion and you will have boundless energy," Crane advises.

The final panelist at Wednesday's Economic Fuel event, Kim Class, loves animals and it shows. The operator of Humboldt County's only pet-sitting service for many years, Class adopted more than 40 cats out of her home before opening the Companion Animal Foundation and Animal Program Center.

Now, she runs the nonprofit organization through the animal foundation thrift shop in the Sunny Brae Shopping Center in Arcata and takes advantage of the local community to garner support and energy for her business. Among other things, Class believes entrepreneurs need to learn to sell their ideas to raise money for their businesses. There is a lot of money out there — take advantage of it, she said.