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Kim Korchinski and Lyle Weichel of WestSource Solutions Inc. make a pitch to judges for the Progress2Capital business planning competition during a five minute limo ride.

Business competition tests local entrepreneurs

By TREVOR NEWELL
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Representatives of eight start-up businesses each had five minutes to impress a panel of judges as they rode through downtown Regina in a stretched SUV limousine.

The sales pitches made up the second-to-last challenge in the five-month Progress2Capital business planning competition, which is organized by the Regina Regional Economic Development Authority (RREDA). The challenge was designed as a simulation of an impromptu meeting between the entrepreneurs and prospective investors. As in real life, the contestants had precious little time to make a big impression.

Kim Korchinski and Lyle Weichel of the eco-solutions firm West Source Solutions discovered how difficult it can be to extoll the virtues of a business in just five minutes.

Weichel told the panel that the firm has been hired by the U of R students' union, as well as the developer of a sustainable community on Last Mountain Lake, to find ways to reduce carbon footprints through the use of technologies, like solar energy for hot

water and geo-thermal energy to heat buildings. But the pair might have wished for more time to give the sales pitch.

"I have a lot more questions," said judge Bev Robertson as the allotted time ran out.

Enole and Jana Tapaquon are the proprietors of Snare Wear Clothing Company. After the limousine pitch was over, Enole admitted to being nervous in front of the judges.

"It was very nerve wracking in there because the judges were expressionless," she said. "I was happy to come out alive."

The cousins plan to establish a store in Regina that combines a full-service salon with a women's clothing boutique specializing in hip-hop wear. Enole said she and her cousin decided to enter the competition as a way to learn more about running a business through the mentorship that the five-month Progress2Capital competition provides.

"It's really helped us believe in ourselves more," she said. "Everyone at RREDA has really encouraged us."

Although they have yet to open their store, Enole and Jana have already established a client base by travelling to the First Nations commu-

nities surrounding Regina with their wares. Enole said it's empowering to be able to run a business as an aboriginal woman. She contrasted that experience with those of generations of aboriginal people — including Jana, as well as her own parents — who attended Indian residential schools as children.

"(Our people) have been through the residential schools system. We've survived it. We can start going forward and we can start succeeding," she said.

Enole said she hopes the salon and boutique takes flight and inspires a new generation of aboriginal entrepreneurs. She added that she's better equipped to make the business succeed as a result of going through the competition.

"I could pitch (the business) to my friends before, but this (experience) is going to give me more confidence to pitch to non-aboriginal people — wearing business suits. It's a totally different world."

The other finalists in the competition were: Black Gold Telemetry; Delta Point Wireless; FOCAM Adverts; Hillberg & Berk; New Wave Environmental Technologies; and Real McCoy Steak Bites.