

STRATEGIC

Business, Education and Regional

PARTNERSHIPS

Minnesota State University Mankato

Phone: 507.389.5567 Fax: 507.389.5588

partnerships@mnsu.edu

*"Connecting knowledge and
the real world."*



A Visit with John Frey

Director of Business and Industry Partnerships

Our most important goal is to connect our students and faculty to business and industry partnership opportunities. This partnership expands Minnesota State's instructional environment to private sector locations and provides students a learning work experience that cannot be duplicated on campus. In turn, business and industry partners benefit from faculty expertise and by engaging eager students with fresh ideas and a strong work ethic on projects important to the company.

The importance of university partnerships can best be described when students are asked: "Why did you choose Minnesota State Mankato?" We would expect, over time, they would identify partnership success as one of the top five reasons, because private sector partnerships will greatly expand their academic majors and their learning opportunities through work with the private sector. This will enhance their education and enable them to "hit the ground running" with career decisions.

However, student opportunities are only half of the equation. Student and faculty talents should also contribute to a solid economic development. As it takes a team to educate a student, it also takes a team to build a robust community with a vibrant economy. Minnesota State Mankato resources, working in partnership, will energize Southern Minnesota; and given the opportunity, many of our graduates would remain in this area following graduation. Thanks to many of you for your early interests in developing partnerships with us.

In This Issue

John Frey**Project Maverick****Interviews:**

Colleen Landkamer

Bill Otis

Brent Krueger

Our Partners



- ◆ Established 1980
Kasota, MN

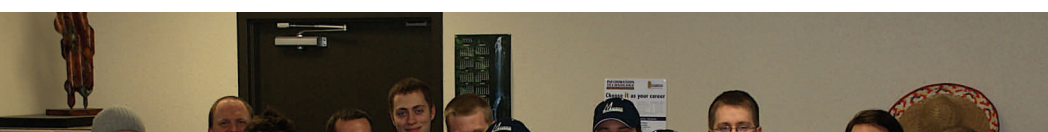
- ◆ Multishot Technology for
Exceptional
Performance



- ◆ MSU 2007 Excellence
Award
- ◆ 2008 Thomson Reuters's
corporate-level Award
of Excellence



- ◆ Founded in 1989
- ◆ High-performance,
energy-saving
electrochromic
technology for buildings





Dr. Michael Wells (Right Front) is a Minnesota State Mankato Professor of Information Systems & Technology and Project Maverick Director

Project Maverick

The Balance Between Internships and Co-ops

Just across from campus, in University Square Mall, an innovative idea is outgrowing its office and only limited by available talent at Minnesota State University, Mankato. For IT/iSYS/CS and students with technology related majors, it strikes a balance between a short internship and a consuming co-op while offering work experience within walking distance from class. Project Maverick students work on real world software development and software testing projects and serve as a pool of resources much like offshore outsourcing staffs in locations such as India and China.

Maverick Software Consulting (MSC) founder, Martin Hebig, created Project Maverick less than three years ago, in August of 2006, and watched his idea surpass all expectations within months. MSC signed a five year contract with Minnesota State Mankato, committing over \$1.2 million to Project Maverick. In 2007, Project Maverick was the recipient of Minnesota State Mankato's Excellence Award in External Funding Incentives for generating the most indirect cost recovery of any contract or grant at Minnesota State Mankato for the fiscal year 2007.

Chuck Sherwood, VP of Software Testing for MSC, oversees daily operations at Project Maverick and is never amazed by the eagerness from students to tackle their projects and learn new job skills. After years of working with college students he's developed a knack for spotting the best candidates during interviews and won't hesitate to encourage under qualified students to reapply the following semester. Josh Harris, Project Maverick student worker, can attest to this, "I didn't get an offer the first time I applied, but I was urged to apply again and it worked out."

Students must complete prerequisite classes and have at least 1 year left in college to qualify for employment. They are expected to work a flexible 20 hours a week during the school year, and 40 hours a week during breaks, with employment extended until they graduate. Students make enough to pay for tuition, room, and board while working on Project Maverick. Project Maverick student worker, Jed Stark, thinks "the work environment is great... I'm learning a lot of things that I wouldn't learn in school... (and) Chuck is the coolest boss ever."

Project Maverick partner Thomson Reuters (TR) is reaping the benefits too. Anna Grecco, Senior Director of Technology for TR, not only sees a higher productivity rate than traditional offshore contractors, she estimates "...new graduate hires from this program are productive at least 3 to 6 months sooner." In addition to serving as an alternative to offshore outsourcing firms, TR has also been able to assign full time employee tasks to Project Maverick allowing them to use the freed in-house resources to complete more projects. In December of 2008, Project Maverick won Thomson Reuters North American Legal's prestigious Award of Excellence in the "People Make the Difference" category.

Mankato State Professor Michael Wells works to recruit student workers, promote Project Maverick and TR on campus, and act as a liaison between the University and Project Maverick. He feels Project Maverick is a tremendous opportunity for students and is passionate about informing students about the benefits that come from such a unique program and partnership. 100% of the students graduating while working for Project Maverick have received full time positions in the industry, 15 of them with Thomson Reuters. In addition, there have been several research articles published or under review dealing the configuration of Project Maverick's entrepreneurial business model and the performance of students versus offshore outsourcers. Anyone seeking more information about Project Maverick can contact Michael Wells at michael.wells@mnsu.edu.



“I think the future
is bright for
Strategic
Partnerships...it
not only *will* grow,
but it *needs* to.”

Colleen Landkamer

Advisory Team Member,
Blue Earth County Commissioner,
Former President of the National Association of Counties

How would you define your role within Strategic Partnerships?

I see my role as being a piece of the community, a sounding board and being able to give feedback. I think there's a really good synergy in the group, and I see that as the biggest strength that we bring, just talking about what could be done, what's possible, and what's happening in other places that we could do here. What's so great about this committee is that it brings people from such diverse backgrounds, with so many different pieces that they have in different parts of the world. It's also a very collegial group, which makes a huge difference. I've never felt intimidated, and that always makes for better discussion. It's a fun, fun group – it's really exciting!

What do you see as the importance of Strategic Partnerships for the University, and for Southern Minnesota?

I think it's the only way we, in rural communities, are going to survive. We need that connection between “town and gown,” where the University does the research, the education – all those things that can really be the bedrock of any community. Then, sharing back and forth information from the community to the University will build the things that are so critical for economic development. You make it grow stronger and able to thrive when a lot of places aren't.

This is an opportunity here. It's made a huge difference in the University. For instance, the alternative fuel focus right now – that came from a few people sitting down and talking about opportunities. Leveraging the engineering department, Richard Davenport being willing to jump in with both feet, a couple of legislators were a part of the group, and I was part of the group because of my federal connections. That's how things happen. I always say, nobody does anything by themselves. It does take a village, and the University's got to be a piece of it.

How would you evaluate this division's impact on the economy and on budgets?

I think it's our hope for the economy. Going out to businesses and seeing what they need, what type of student they're going to hire; the types of educational backgrounds, such as writing skills, students must have. At times there has been a disconnect there – a significant disconnect. With Strategic Partnerships, it's a great opportunity to see what businesses need and see how the University can fill that need.

Also to give students an opportunity, instead of doing an internship for eight weeks, doing it for a semester or two, through the co-ops, which is so exciting! That all came from this group – somebody knew about it working somewhere else. I think it's the only way you'll see strong economies in southern Minnesota – if there's a direct connection with universities, community colleges, unions, to see how we can get businesses what they need in order to be successful.

Where do you see this division going in the future?

I see it getting much broader. With Bob taking over more responsibility for our external reach, I think it'll just get much stronger. I think President Davenport and the community see that this needs to be stronger. So, I think the future is bright for Strategic Partnerships, and I think it not only *will* grow, but it *needs* to. There are great

opportunities here and we've got to seize them, we can't lose them. It's looking at a whole new world and figuring out how we can do it better!



Bill Otis

Advisory Board Member,
President and CEO of New Ulm Telecom, Inc.

“Everything I’ve heard is that the students want to do such a great job, they’ll probably do better than a professional who’s in the field....”

How would you describe your role with Strategic Partnerships?

As far as my role on the Advisory Board, it is maybe to bring a little bit more of the real world or business world into academia. Where the University has some great programs, sometimes it's a little bit of a disconnect of what you're looking for as an employer. So, I think that is to say that how programs are put together and what's included in programs is important to the business community. When you're in business, you're less worried about exactly what degree they have, versus what can they really do, and how can they apply that. It's more of a practical application.

How would you evaluate this division's impact on the economy and on budgets?

I know there are examples of teams of engineering students going out, looking at a process and then coming back and doing something. The business probably would not have done that if they had to pay the full freight of an engineering firm coming in, because it's awfully expensive and there's no guarantee that you're going to have success, but you'll pay the price, regardless. So therefore, you let students come in, and you feel good about it because they're working.

You know up front, that it's going to cost you a few thousand dollars. Everything I've heard is that the students want to do such a great job, they'll probably do better than a professional who's in the field because the professionals are doing it all the time, and they think, "Here's how we do it." Where the students are saying, "Are we sure we did it the right way? Maybe we should look at it *this way*." As well, the professors are helping in this process.

In our organization, if the only answer to somebody's question, "Why are we doing it this way?" is, "It's the way we've always done it." that's the wrong answer. At that point in time, everybody knows, "*Well that's one thing we're going to change!*"

What value do you see that Strategic Partnerships has for the University, and for Southern Minnesota?

I think there's a great benefit for the students of the University to get a little bit of real-life experience and what is expected out in the real world.

Honestly, this program allows a pretty nice internship or co-op situation for a larger company, where you know you're going to be hiring somebody down the road, and if you go through a couple of internships and you find somebody that you want. It's also a win for the students – practical experience. I think there's a lot more demand out there than people realize.

I can also tell you that it's been wonderful to hear some of the examples of actual students going out, and whether it's internships or cooperatives, students are going out and getting that practical experience. Not only is that wonderful for the business, especially if the person is hired after their education, but it also gives you resources that smaller businesses would not have. They may not be able to have two or three engineers take a

resources that smaller businesses would not have. They may not be able to have two or three engineers take a look at a project, where here they do, because it's a project through the University.

Where do you see this division going in the future?

I think it has a great opportunity to expand with the private sector, and with education – in classes, and doing specific projects. Because, I think that as the economy moves forward (and hopefully it's moving forward!), we're going to want to continue to do more with less, and we're going to want to do more in-house. I think that we are going to take less risk on the people that we hire.

I believe that as time goes forward, our society will focus a lot more on what we call today a “non-traditional student.” In a lot of cases, you will find the right people. They are going to need to be re-educated over and over and over if they're going to stay with their company.

The other thing is that the University, if they want to grow their base and service more than just the traditional students, they've got to look outside the campus, outside the normal box. That may mean putting together a specific program at an employer's location, or within another community. And it may be a *program*, it may be a supervisory program. It may not be a *degree program*, as much as, “here's the need – here's what we're seeing, here's what we're lacking.” This is what the Strategic Partnership Division brings to the University. It matches the needs of the external community to the research and knowledge of the faculty.



“I think it's very important for students to find out what it is and use it as a resource.”

Brent Krueger

Junior in Marketing
Minnesota State University, Mankato

What did you do through Strategic Partnerships?

Initially, Mr. Hoffman wanted to have a meeting with me. When we sat down, he said, “It sounds like you'd be a good representation of what we're trying to do here. I have a few opportunities lined up, and I'd like you to come out with me and meet a few people.”

When we did that, the first stop was Rolco, Inc. It's a plastic injection molding company in Kasota, Minnesota, and I felt really good about it from the first meeting. I went out for a second interview again, and right on the spot, they said, “We'd like to have you!” By the end of the summer, before I even did my internship, they offered me a position. I did the internship for credit through the University, and I'm still with them today.

Technically, I would still consider myself involved with Strategic Partnerships, just because I still have feedback from and talk with Mr. Hoffman. We get together about every three or four months. I'll go up to his office or he's been out to Rolco to meet with me. We're still meeting for the ongoing sake of the program and for each other's benefit.

How did that experience work out for you?

It's been going great so far. It seems like every day my responsibilities grow. Spending a year there has taught me almost as much as my entire four years in school, just because I actually get to see the stuff happening and experience it.

My title is Project Coordinator. Last summer, I was almost like a Project Manager. They gave me a project that

my title is Project Coordinator. Last summer, I was almost like a Project Manager. They gave me a project that was still in the development stage. From there I took it over, making sure samples were done on time, and schedules were thought out: who needs to be doing what and when they need to do it, when it's due. When I started school again, they moved me into more of a customer service role. Right now, I'm in charge of ten or eleven customer accounts. They made it very apparent that they're willing to work around my schedule, and made it sound as though that position will be there when I'm done. It's nice to have that security!

What opportunities do you see in the future for other students?

I see it as a great way to take the pressure off. A lot of my friends, who haven't had the opportunity to work with an area like Strategic Partnerships, are trying to find internships, trying to find jobs, and it's tough out there. It's so competitive. I was going into a meeting with a great recommendation from a guy sitting next to me, and that alone helped me realize, they've got to see something in me. It just really convinced me that the process worked.

I would say that checking with Strategic Partnerships would be as important as going to the Career Development Center or going to career fairs. Anything you can do in the real world is going to help you, and there have been four or five cases of success coming out of Strategic Partnerships. It seems like the University is really trying to push it, too. So I think it's very important for students to find out what it is and use it as a resource.

In our next issue...

- Additional Student Perspectives
- SAGE Electrochromics, Inc. – A unique strategic partnership
- Spotlight on Advisory Team Members
 - Larry Anderson, AgStar Financial Services, ACA
 - Jim Wendorff, Viracon, Inc.

Strategic Business, Education and Regional Partnerships
329 Wigley Administration Center · Mankato, MN 56001