

Firm helps construct a 'greener' future

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PEDRO PORTAL / EL NUEVO HERALD STAFF

Daniel Naim, left, and Jean Paul Ciaramella, pictured at FIU's Solar House, won second place and were the People's Pick for Ecode, a green-building resource site.

When Jean Paul Ciaramella and Daniel Naim got to talking several years ago at the Venezuelan Business Club, they discovered they both worked in the construction industry, were passionate for sustainability and possessed entrepreneurial spirits.

That became the foundation for Ecode, a green-building resource site that won second place in the Business Plan Challenge FIU track. Ecode was also the People's Pick winner in that track.

Ecodeonline.com is a green building resource site that provides tools for both contractors and the general public. The site includes a green building guide, a directory -- and coming soon -- a project lead finder. Ecode is also working on an iPhone

application.

"We started noticing green construction becoming a really important topic among developers and contractors and clients. . . . Most of the customers wanted to do green building but they did not know how," Ciaramella said. Certified green building, he said, can be more complex than conventional.

Ciaramella, who graduated from FIU with a degree in marketing and finance last December, began creating EcodeOnline.com when he was in college. A job at a construction development company while he was in school sparked his interest in green building. He's now marketing director at OneClick, an Apple-authorized reseller in Doral.

Naim, who has an MBA from Nova Southeastern University and a bachelor's in systems engineering from his native Venezuela, is a green-building certified general contractor who now runs his own business, Naim Development of Miami. He is also the founder of the Venezuelan Business Club, 8,000 members strong.

With the help of five others -- Sergio Ibarra Bolaños, Neil Levy, Carlos Leal, Alejandro Alcantara and Andres Peña, mainly friends of Ciaramella's from college -- they are well underway on Ecodeonline.com.

The team is using Web tools to determine which five to 10 states with the highest green-building demand it wants to target first.

“We are still considering whether we will attack the Florida market. . . . To be honest, it is one of the least green states,” Ciaramella said. No. 1 is California.

The team created a Google AdWords campaign to market the venture and is targeting members of the U.S. Green Building Council and other national organizations.

Right now, startup costs are coming from personal savings but the team may try to seek venture capital in the future. Revenue streams will come from advertising and bidding revenue from the planned Green Leads service, Ciaramella said.

Judges were impressed with the business idea and plan but thought the revenue model needs some development.

What keeps them going? Passion.

“We want society to understand building green can be done with any budget. You can save energy and water and recycle,” said Naim. “I hope in a few years, every house built in the U.S. would be built with green technology. That would be amazing.”

Adds Ciaramella: “The idea of creating something new and developing that idea is kind of a rush.”