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SUNDAY, JUNE 26, 2005

THE WINNING STRATEGY

Area businessmen take highest honors

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A man from Shelton and one from Milford, both recent graduates of the executive master of business administration program at the University of New Haven, are grand champions in an international business contest.



WILLIAMS

The Business Strategy Invitational is an online simulation in which students from all over the world competed against one another, managing a fictional sneaker company.



RATZENBERGER

Shelton resident Don Williams, 34, and Roger Ratzenberger, 45, of Milford, were sole managers of their respective companies. The competition was an extension of a business simulation class they took during their last semester as MBA candidates.

Williams and Ratzenberger competed in a 10-week simulation during the semester. Then they were asked to compete in the invitational, which represented the best compa-

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Awards honor pair of local businessmen

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nies of the previous 10 weeks.

"First of all, the teams in the BSI had to qualify, and that was not easy," said Greg Stappenbeck, 44, co-author of the Business Strategy Game. "You had to finish in the top 20. ... Only 5 percent qualified and 3 percent decided to compete. It's a very selective group to begin with."

"There were 10 world champions," Williams said.

Williams and Ratzenberger were the only students from Connecticut to earn world champion status.

More than 200 universities from 20 countries were represented in the original simulation. That was narrowed down to 59 universities in the invitational.

"This is a company you take over, [you pretend] it's been around for 10 years," Williams said. "How are you going to grow the company?"

The two had hoped to be teammates, but instead ended up competing against one another.

"It was ironic we both got to the grand championships, and we both won," Williams said.

The purpose of the simulation was to tie in the many different business aspects that had been covered in the students' classes.

"We did this completely on our own," Ratzenberger said.

"The professor showed us how to use the software and that's it. If you screwed up, you had to figure it out yourself," Williams said. "There were 80 to 90 decisions you had to make each period."

They credit a combination of what they learned inside the classroom and real-life work experiences with helping them formulate their win-

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— **Greg Stappenbeck**,
on The Business Strategy Invitational

ning strategies.

"A lot of the strategies that were part of the game I don't do yet at work. We learned more in the 10 days than the whole time, so hopefully I can apply this to work," said Ratzenberger, who works at Pitney Bowes.

"I think it was a combination of my work experience and education," said Williams, who is director of channel sales and quality at CTL Inc., a software company in Shelton. "It is a capstone simulation; you have a sneaker company competing to see operation marketing, strategies, finance — it ties all your courses together."

Factors such as stock prices, return on equity, credit and image ratings all played into the weekly score that each company received.

"They had to be able to adapt and employ all of their business training. There is no secret to winning the competition," Stappenbeck said.

Both students realized that a winning strategy would need to focus on high product value at a low price, which is what they both did.

"We chose the low-cost leadership strategy," Williams said of his winning tactic. "Mind you, people see what you're doing; it's who can execute your strategy the best. If you lower prices, they can do the same."

The teams were scored daily. The average of the investor expectation and the best in industry scores were what de-

termined the daily rankings. At the end of the 10 days, both Williams and Ratzenberger scored on top.

"You come into the company; they want to see you grow revenues, net profits, earnings per share, all things shareholders would want to see you do," Williams said.

"They look at it from a consumer perspective," Ratzenberger said.

Every day, the teams would log onto the Business Strategy Invitational Web site and go through pages of decisions each manager needed to make regarding the future of their company. Each day of the competition represented a new calendar year.

"It took two to four hours a day to process all the information to make your next decision," Ratzenberger said.

The highest score a team could earn was 110. At the end of the competition, Williams scored 102, while Ratzenberger earned a 101. Williams and Ratzenberger received certificates from The Business Strategy Game and are listed in the BSI Hall of Fame on the company's Website. Each was also given an outstanding achievement award from the university at the MBA banquet.

The Business Strategy Game was created by Stappenbeck and Art Thompson and has been in operation since 1990. This was the first time the international online invitational was run; however, due to the success of its debut, Stappenbeck hopes to run the invitational in the future.

"Now that we're online we can do that pretty easily," Stappenbeck said. "It was quite popular and successful."