

Quinnipiac Entrepreneurs Link Student Spending With Area Businesses

Hamden, CONN. – A Quinnipiac University student's late-night pizza craving could result in hot sales for businesses in Greater New Haven that want a slice of the more than \$18 million students spend annually.

"It was 2 a.m. and my roommates and I wanted pizza," said Todd Scherzer, 21, an entrepreneurship and small business major from Monmouth Junction, N.J. "We realized there was no handy guide to area restaurants. When my roommates and I struggled to find the phone numbers for local restaurants near the campus, we knew there was a need for a booklet with this information."

Scherzer's appetite for compiling a one-stop guide to area restaurants, retailers and service providers was shared by fellow members of Quinnipiac's Students in Free Enterprise club (SIFE). They researched, wrote and distributed a questionnaire about spending habits to 800 undergraduates and law students. The results showed that the average Quinnipiac student spends \$400 a month on food, shopping and entertainment – nearly twice the national average. Eighty-three percent said they still shop in stores despite having access to buying products online.

SIFE members felt that businesses would want a piece of that \$18 million pie. To finance the production costs of a new "QU Life Around Town" guide, they wrote sales pitches and contracts and then went door-to-door selling ads to retailers. For those who couldn't afford an ad, which ranged from \$375 for a quarter page to \$1,500 for a full page, the entrepreneurs used the barter system.

New Haven's Broadway Merchants Association was eager to advertise. "This opportunity was in keeping with our goal to reach students outside of the Yale community," said Troy Resch, a member of the organization's board of directors. "We already advertise in Quinnipiac's student newspaper, so this was perfect synergy. Downtown New Haven's restaurants, clubs and clothing stores are open until 9 p.m., so this is a perfect demographic for Quinnipiac students."

Scherzer said the free guide is a win-win situation for both shopkeepers and students. "In Hamden alone, Quinnipiac students add \$5.6 million to the economy just through their food purchases," he said. "They spent almost \$1.8 million last year at local supermarkets because they either live off campus, don't have access to campus dining or prefer to cook their meals."

Restaurants and pizza places came in second in food spending. Scherzer said pizza is the number one fast food choice for students.

Keeping up appearances also adds up. According to the survey, students spend nearly \$650,000 on their hair during the school year. Beauty products alone account for another \$900,000.

Quinnipiac Professor of Management Ronald McMullen is SIFE's advisor. He said that businesses and students won't be the only beneficiaries of the guide, which made about \$5,000 from advertising sales. "Proceeds after production costs will go towards financing future club projects, such as Sail New Haven's program for inner city youth," he said. "The club's salespeople will also receive a small commission."

Club members have also learned the meaning of free enterprise. "They've gained valuable, first-hand experience, which is in keeping with the university's mission to promote community service and academic interest in service-learning courses," said McMullen. He added that the project will be presented in regional and international competitions in the hope of winning prizes and recognition for SIFE and Quinnipiac.

For their part, students are eagerly awaiting their new guidebooks. In the interim, two enterprising freshmen have put the guide's ads on the web. Michael Zecher, 18, of Marlboro, N.J., and Yusuf Qasim, 18, of Manalapan, N.J., included the information on their student-oriented website that is easily accessed from the university's home page. In less than a month, there were 10,200 hits.

The club will update the booklet each semester and make it a permanent fixture in dorm rooms. "We also plan to extend this idea to other schools," Scherzer said. "It's been a great way to combine real-world experience with what we learn in the classroom." It may be a tall order, but it's one that SIFE is eager to fill.

Quinnipiac University is a private, coeducational, non-sectarian institution located 90 miles north of New York City and two hours from Boston. The university enrolls nearly 5,000 full-time undergraduate and 2,000 graduate students in more than 50 undergraduate and 17 graduate programs of study in Business, Health Sciences, Law, Liberal Arts, Education and Communications. Quinnipiac consistently ranks among the top universities master's northern region in US News and World Report's America's Best Colleges. For more information, visit www.quinnipiac.edu.