

Student's company markets wild game soup

By PATRICIA ECKER
Sun Staff Writer

The Itchy Splits bowling team has been missing one of their teammates these days.

Instead of bowling, Cason Thorsby, entrepreneur and a graduate student at Central Michigan University, says he has been tirelessly working to bring to market his idea for a unique soup.

Dixie Dave's Wild Game Soup Company is the dream to reality concept of the 22-year-old CMU graduate of the LaBelle Entrepreneurship College and business development manager for the CMU Research Corp.

"We're in the product development stage," Thorsby said. "We want to start manufacturing it."

"We've received some nice feedback on our soups."

The soup company is the third business venture for Thorsby. As he worked his way through the entrepre-

neurship program he started a tent rental company and a deck staining company.

"I was starting companies on the side," Thorsby said. "After my first semester and intro to entrepreneurship, I started Elite Tent Rental."

"I also started a deck staining company and hired all my buddies."

Thorsby said that at the age of 21, he had one of the largest party rental companies in Genesee County.

"But I had another dream - the Wild Game Soup Company," Thorsby said.

A happenstance experience in Metamora, where he was renting some tents, led him to a restaurant where he tasted his first wild game soup, he said.

"They took us to dinner, and we ordered the pheasant noodle soup," Thorsby said. "My dad and I looked at each other when we took a bite, and said 'This is the best soup we've ever

They took us to dinner, and we ordered the pheasant noodle soup. My dad and I looked at each other when we took a bite, and said 'This is the best soup we've ever tasted.'

Cason Thorsby,
explaining how he first became interested in wild game soup

tasted.'

"I thought, if you could only *can* this, nobody would buy Campbell's or Progresso ever again."

Thorsby said that he was unable to get the recipe from the restaurant, and had no recipes of his own.

He said that he heard about Dixie Dave Minar and got the gumption to approach him one day, not as a business person, but as a student.

"I was sort of sly about it," Thorsby said. "I had holey jeans, wore a beanie

with the bill pointing west, and I wore a T-shirt that said 'I love hot moms,' with my boxers showing."

Thorsby said that during his two and a half hour talk with Minar, he shared all the secrets of the wild game soup process with him, and because of this, he asked him to be his business partner.

"I told him that I was a student at CMU doing a business plan, and I wanted to start a wild game soup company," Thorsby said. "And we pretty much made

a gentleman's agreement that I would do the business side, and he would do the cooking side."

Thorsby said that Minar came to CMU with samples of his soup, which he said are 10 times better than his first game soup experience.

"That's when it all started," Thorsby said. "It was true, and I was making the business, marketing, and financial plans."

"I won first place in a competition to pitch to investor companies that was in December 2008. Since then Dave and I have been going around to different companies doing testing," he said.

The manufacturing process has been very timely and technical, Thorsby said.

"We want the soup to taste just like it does when Dave makes it at his restaurant," Thorsby said. "And offer a healthy alternative to what's available."

(See Soup, Page 2A)

Soup

(Continued from Page 1A)

The menu of soups for canning consists of venison chili, venison stew, venison and wild mushrooms, elk tips and red wine sauce, buffalo barley, wild boar and black beans, pheasant and wild rice, and gator gumbo, according to the company Web site.

"Dave's got a way of making these soups that are low in sodium taste good," Thorsby said. "They will be gluten free, low sodium because it is important to Dave for his customers to experience a meal without (irritating sensitive stomachs)."

"When you go to Dave's restaurant, he uses only the finest and the best ingredients."

Thorsby said that Minar is "celebrity in the wild

game world", and he is the owner of the Old Dixie Inn of Birch Run where he specializes in wild game cuisine.

Although he went to CMU with the full intention of making his mark, Thorsby said he never thought he would own a soup company.

"I didn't want to leave here without making sure the entrepreneurship program knew who I was," Thorsby said. "I ended up taking first place (with his business plan) in the 'Make a pitch competition.'"

"You do a five-minute pitch to a board, and I wanted to blow the socks off of them. That's when I knew my plan was valid," he said.

Thorsby said they hope the soup will be available by

summer, and he has come full circle with his learning experience at CMU.

"I've always been a fingertip length away from help," Thorsby said. "(The CMU Research Corp.) works in conjunction with the university, and we have two classes of undergrad students doing the marketing for the company."

"They're doing real world stuff, and it's cool to do a project for a real business. If this thing flies, they were a part of it," he said.

While he's working toward his master of business administration degree, he is helping others start their business.

"As a graduate assistant at CMU RC, I get to work with them to get their ideas and businesses off the ground," Thorsby said.