

# The Crimson White

## Student entrepreneurs compete for tornado recovery funding

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by Stephen Walker

Late Monday evening, students and professors from the University crowded into Lloyd Hall Auditorium to hear the UA Student Social Entrepreneurs presentations in what was the final round of the Tornado Recovery Initiative, sponsored by the UA Center for Ethics & Social Responsibility.

During the preceding weeks, each group designed a project to help Tuscaloosa recover from the April 27 tornado, according to a news release from the University. Groups that were selected to go to the final round competed for up to \$15,000 to help make their vision become a reality. Eight finalists made it to Monday's forum.

"This is where it moves from being a good idea to being real," said Stephen Black, director of the Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility at the University.

The opening presentation, Arts for Alberta, is designed to help students of Alberta Elementary recover from the mental devastation many have experienced since the tornado.

"Alberta Elementary took a direct hit from the April 27 tornado," group member Savannah Bernal said. "Our program, Arts for Alberta, aims to help these affected students recover both emotionally and psychologically through therapeutic art."

In addition to a series of weekend day camps, the children would also construct a collaborative art project that would then be presented to Alberta Elementary.

Another project, Trees for T-Town, would allow local school children to plant trees in the Forest Lake area, one of the most heavily damaged areas of Tuscaloosa.

"The mission of Trees for T-Town is to first empower the residents living in the Forest Lake neighborhood to better restore their lake and to also offer valuable lessons concerning the sustaining of our environment," said Andrew Lloyd. "The way we want to do that is by planting trees."

Next in the lineup was PlanFirst, which would train students to communicate with local property and business owners about zoning laws and ordinances, taking the burden off of the Tuscaloosa Planning Department, according to Wesley Vaughn.

"So far, everyone has been getting involved in creating the Tuscaloosa Forward plan, but now we are starting to implement the new zoning codes," he said. "And that's where we would come in, because the Tuscaloosa Forward plan is going to start affecting the entire devastated area."

Another presentation, Recycle Tuscaloosa, Recycle, would facilitate recycling in local schools. According to group member Colton Altier, the group would distribute recycling bins to local schools and teach school children about how and what to recycle.

Project Bright Side, another tornado recovery initiative, would develop relationships with children at local Boys and Girls Clubs, as well as give them money to donate to local charities, group member Marissa Ellin said.

The Tuscaloosa Spring Break Initiative would help Tuscaloosa recover by finding ways for students from other universities to spend their break helping Tuscaloosa rebuild.

Another project, called Reading Recharge, aimed at helping local libraries recover from what little the tornado left behind.

The final group presented an idea for a tornado and severe weather education program known as Tornado EDU. Similar to Alcohol EDU, this program would be mandatory for all students prior to their enrollment at UA.

“I feel like a lot of students that come to Alabama haven’t experienced a tornado before,” Leslie Branch said. “I think that Tornado Edu is a really great need. We should all know how to react in the event of a tornado.”

After the presentations concluded and the judges had deliberated, Mark Nelson, vice president for Student Affairs who served on the panel of judges, commended each group for their effort.

“Each group has done an outstanding job with their project,” Nelson said. “You have also done a good job, we think, of cutting costs for most of these projects. What we have found is that it doesn’t cost a lot to have a huge impact on our community.”

Because of the quality of the ideas, the judges had difficulty awarding money to one group.

“We have determined that each of the projects that were presented tonight will receive funding on some level,” Nelson said.

Plan First, Recycle Tuscaloosa, Recycle and Tornado EDU were selected as the winners and will receive full funding for their respective projects, Nelson said.

“All of you will begin progress over the next semester and next years of being leaders that actually create real world initiatives at the University,” Black said.