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It started as a computer science class project at Washington State University Vancouver, but GeoMonkey has become a business venture. GeoMonkey software was developed by WSUV professor Orest Pilskalns, seated right, and students, left to right, Adam McDonald, Aaron Mills, Kurtis McCoy, Jacob Moore, Stephen Mesa, Jason Donowitz, Keith Hacker, Susan Seley and Kevin Karpenske, as well as Fred Haslam, not pictured.

GeoMonkey Business

WSUV students, professor launch online map, social site that began as project

By COURTNEY SHERWOOD
Columbian staff writer

Vancouver's stake in the online social networking craze — think MySpace — debuted Tuesday, when a group of home-grown programmers unveiled GeoMonkey.

The new company, online at www.geomonkey.com, aims to connect people through maps. Web surfers can share driving directions to a wedding or routes of a marathon, create news maps that point to current-event hot spots, and peg photos of their travels to maps of destinations.

GeoMonkey started as a classroom case study at Washington State University Vancouver last spring and is now the first company to be launched directly because of work and research done at the campus.

GEOMONKEY.COM

- **WHAT:** Web-based maps and social networking.
- **WHO:** Launched by professor and students at Washington State University Vancouver.
- **REVENUE SOURCES:** Web advertising and paid subscribers.
- **LOOKING AHEAD:** Founders hope that revenues will grow enough to pay a student staff worker.

"We developed a prototype in class" as part of an academic project, said Orest Pilskalns, assistant professor of computer science.

When the class ended, Pilskalns believed there was market potential for an enhanced version of the program.

He sought funding from the WSU Research Foundation's Cougar Gap

Fund and won a grant of almost \$20,000 to buy equipment and pay four computer science students to continue development work through last summer.

Lessons learned

Getting GeoMonkey off the ground taught lessons beyond the classroom, students said.

"We learned about tools and methods that are more practical" than when classroom projects have a more academic approach, said Adam McDonald, a senior.

"We learned a lot about working as a team," said senior Kevin Karpenske. "And about starting a business."

Cougar Gap funding only lasted through the summer, but the stu-

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dents continued their work on the software through 2006. Pilskalns paid out of pocket to cover some technology costs.

"Now it's on our shoulders as members of the corporation to make this work," he said.

GeoMonkey has two planned revenue sources, online advertising and paid subscriptions.

Most subscribers will sign up for free accounts, Pils-

skalns said, but people have the option of paying extra to be given access to extra features.

The path to financial success for any new tech venture is a difficult one.

Initially, GeoMonkey's founders hope that revenue will grow enough to pay to run the Web site. Pilskalns said he hopes revenues eventually grow enough to support a paid student worker.

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