



MEDIA RELEASE

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Making a good thing better: Product improvement process turns into a learning experience for Okanagan College students

Take a B.C. entrepreneur with a proven idea, add in a class of determined and focused Mechanical Engineering Technology Students from Okanagan College, and you have the recipe for applied innovation.

Paul Auger is President of SNO-LIMO Mountain Eco-Touring, a company that has developed a chauffeured touring chair that can whisk non-skiers around a ski-hill for a first-hand experience of resort slopes.

He developed the concept and the first fleet of chairs several years ago. His chairs were at work at Whistler for the Olympics and have been on the slopes at Big White for five years.

But as functional, practical and safe as his sliding chairs have been, Auger saw the need to bring some engineering expertise to bear as he contemplates improvements and developing the next fleet of SNO-LIMOs.

Enter Okanagan College's Mechanical Engineering Technology program, and Professor Iain Cameron. Auger approached Cameron, who saw an opportunity to give his class of students a chance to undertake a project that would incorporate problem-solving, brainstorming, refining, improving, prototyping and testing a real-world product.

Their efforts hit the slope on Sunday, Dec. 12 at Big White, as students, Auger, Cameron and others get to see first hand how the chair's systems have been improved.

"I have no kind of technical background," says Auger. "I'm a duct-tape kind of guy."

Auger admits that the kind of detailed analysis, testing and development the students have undertaken would have been beyond his company's means – the connection with Okanagan College made it possible.

Students have developed improvements to the braking system, to sled articulation, and to rider comfort. A student design team working on the suspension and seat developed a pneumatic system that allows standard ski lifts to transport the chairs up the hill. They've taken them from the idea stage, through mockups and validation and into prototype development.

For Cameron, the connection with SNO-LIMO and Auger was a great opportunity to put a full class to work on a project that meets the course needs and requirements for students. “It was a product they could see and understand, and most of them ski, so they could appreciate what was going on.”

“Truthfully, it is an example of how a College is part of applied innovation in this country. It’s great to teach students that they have a role to play now and later, as technologists, in innovation.”

Auger’s company has earned national and international media attention with the product and service associated with the SNO-LIMO. As the company’s website notes, significant portions of the public who visit ski resorts don’t actually ski or board: the SNO-LIMO is a way for them to get the true, on-hill experience that many of them may be seeking.

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EDITORS: NEWS DIRECTORS

Performance testing of the prototype will begin Sunday at 9 a.m. at Big White at the Bullet Chair. For more information, contact Iain Cameron (250) 862-1249 or Paul Auger (604) 902-6701.

Photo attached of Vincent Legare-Roy (left) and Sean Muller (right) verifying measurements of a prototype pneumatic lift system, as part of the Mechanical Engineering Technology class project at Okanagan College.