

Frank W. Busch, III

McGuire Class of 1997

When entrepreneurship is in your blood, there's no stopping it. You may not be the next Bill Gates or Richard Branson, but you'll eventually find a way to do something new, or do something old but do it better than anyone else.

The latter describes Frank Busch's path and his recent launch of Thomas Title & Escrow, providing insurance, real estate settlement and escrow services with a focus on complex commercial transactions.

After leaving the Eller College with a degree in entrepreneurship in 1997, Busch went on to graduate from the prestigious University of California Hastings College of the Law. He wasn't certain where his career would take him, only that he had a passion for business and law. He ended up landing a position with Snell & Wilmer, one of the largest full-service law firms in the Western United States.

Busch did corporate and securities law for Snell & Wilmer for two and a half years before he had the opportunity to join the legal department at First National Bank of Arizona in 2002. The position gave him the chance to learn banking from the inside, a view he'd lacked as a business lawyer. Along the way, he came very close to being part of the launch of a new bank. The deal fell through, but the entrepreneurial fire had been lit and there was no dousing it. "I knew I wasn't going to be happy until I was calling some shots," Busch admits. By the fall of 2005, he was mentally shaping the initial plans for his own company. In January 2006, he left First National, and this past August opened doors at Thomas Title.

Of course, title and insurance companies are nothing new. But Busch saw the

industry as a perfect fit for him: It combines two areas for which he has both passion and experience — law and financial services. Busch also has a command of real estate since it had formed the basis of most of First National's lending portfolio. With the backing of two family members he was on his way. The only question was how: How to make a go in an industry some might say is already saturated, how to set Thomas Title apart?

Busch's strategy for gaining a competitive edge — the entrepreneurial factor in doing something old in a better way — is three-fold. First, there's the focus of the business: commercial deals, including escrow for intellectual property. "We're billing ourselves as a higher-end provider of solutions for complex transactions," he explains. To his knowledge, Thomas Title is the first company in Arizona to do so, and Busch has gone out of his way to communicate sophistication — more of a law firm look and feel — in everything from the company's Web presence to its Scottsdale offices.

Second, the company will build its reputation on relationships. For the past several years, Busch watched the steady success of community banks as they pulled customers from the few national chains that dominate the business banking landscape. These smaller banks succeed because they're more flexible, because their clients can reach real people on the phone, and because they know those clients by their names, not numbers, Busch explains. "I was living that every day," he says. "I saw it happening and realized that there was the same opportunity in title and escrow services where all the power is currently concentrated in three big players."



Frank W. Busch, III



Last but not least, innovation gives Thomas Title a leg up. "This industry is way behind in technology," Busch notes. "I've secured some technology that I think is the best out there, very cutting edge, and we're going to use it to it's absolute full capacity." The company's "deal portals" serve as a prime example. In an industry almost comically drowning in paperwork — documents that are mailed and faxed and sent by messenger services back and forth, back and forth — Thomas Title gives clients a password-protected online portal to all their transactions. They can log in to get up-to-date information on transaction status, communicate with their agents through an online note system, and access a complete library of documents in the transaction library — agents and clients alike can upload or download files as needed. "I'm not a huge tech guy, but I saw an opportunity there," Busch says. "We want to make transactions as painless as possible and eliminate wasted time. People are just going to fall off their chairs when they realize how much easier this is." ●

Bridges to Innovation
ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SCIENCE



Alaine Levine

"I like to say that a lecture is a great way to learn, and you get a lot out of it, but the magic really occurs over a beer and a burrito."

Alaina G. Levine has turned that belief into one of the most distinctive elements of the required *Topics in Entrepreneurship for Scientists* course she teaches as director of the Professional Science Masters (PSM) Program in

Applied Science and Business at The University of Arizona. Each week, she treats four or five students from the class to dinner with that week's guest speaker, someone like Ron G. King, director of technology transfer at Translational Genomics Research Institute, or Robert Morrison, founder of Sunquest Information Systems and executive director of the Desert Angels — an organization focused on funding entrepreneurial ventures, reviewing more than 100 companies per year as possible investments. Morrison is also now a Mentor-in-Residence with the McGuire Entrepreneurship Program.

"I've had students get internships, jobs, and even get seed funding for their own companies at these dinners," Levine confides with notable (and deserved) pride in her voice. But the dinners are only one component of what has become one of the most popular science classes on campus. The course is built on three elements. First, weekly lectures from speakers like those named above, flown in from around the country to share their personal expertise and experience in specific areas of business development.

"I've had students get internships, jobs, and even get seed funding for their own companies at these dinners."

Students also are required to attend an industry-related event during the semester. Most students in the program have had zero exposure to business, Levine explains: "This is to get them out of their comfort zone as scientists and help them to understand the importance of networking in a diverse environment and learn what an industrial environment is like."

Lastly, students work in teams to create a white paper that is essentially an early-stage business plan. Levine guarantees diversity on the teams by requiring that each one have not more than two students from one discipline. Together, they identify a problem in society and a solution based in technology. While the paper doesn't address every detail of a launching a venture, the students do complete a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis, examine market issues, define a product or service and explore how it could be brought to market and distributed."

Levine started creating the class in the summer of 2003 with an Entrepreneurial Scholars grant from the McGuire Center for Entrepreneurship. "When I heard about the grant, I realized immediately that this would meet our needs and help us add a very unique aspect to the Professional Science Masters. This is among only a very few entrepreneurship education classes at the graduate level, headquartered in a science department anywhere in the United States."

The response to the class has been tremendous, Levine says, not only from students but from the business community, as well. "The industry leaders — when they come to speak or hear the students' business plan presentations — they are floored. They're amazed by the caliber of the students, and they're amazed that this kind of opportunity exists at The University of Arizona," she explains.

As a result, Levine has had no problem finding business visionaries willing to contribute to the class. "They're thrilled to participate because they recognize that by educating science students about entrepreneurship, we are preparing them to better meet the needs of technology-based companies, whether they're start-ups or established. I really believe that when you teach science students business and entrepreneurship skills, you're making a huge difference not only in their individual careers but in the economic welfare of this country." ●