

## Business Pioneers Inspire, Instruct Executive Students

*Inaugural C-Level Dinner at Naveen Jindal School of Management Provided One-on-One Networking*

Nov. 30, 2011



Business pioneers networked with UT Dallas students at the inaugural C-Level Dinner. [Club](#).

The various accounts of how the executives built their businesses helped Veal see the potential of some of her own ideas.

“I didn’t come in [to the Executive MBA program] to start my own business,” she said. “However, it sounds possible now.”

Madison Pedigo, E-Club adviser and assistant director of the school’s innovation and entrepreneurship programs, and E-Club vice president Amrita Choudhury helped organize the dinner to give students one-on-one access to business pioneers.



Raj Chhabra, outgoing Entrepreneurship Club president, and Craig Moore, president of Nothing Bundt Cakes.

During the event, incoming E-Club president Frank Morrone, called on each executive to tell their story. The evening was full of anecdotes, pep talks, insights and unvarnished truths as the executives described their paths in business.

Craig Wax, CEO of [Invodo](#), asked for a show of hands from those who had recently watched a video via a mobile device or computer. “Video is taking over the Internet,” he said as a sea of hands went up.

He explained that his Austin-based company creates product videos and captures data analytics after the videos have been posted on websites such as YouTube or retail sites.

Students were able to join executives for smaller dinner-table discussions.

Jeff Thornness, founder and CEO of [ACH Direct](#) in Allen, said he spoke to students at his table about motivation, management skills and how to grow a fledgling business into a fully realized operation. ACH Direct is a check and payment verification processor.

He said he was impressed by the students' questions. He said he viewed his invitation to the event as a compliment. “I just couldn’t turn it down,” he said.

Graduate student Harold Burman sat with Craig Moore, the retired CEO of [Cici's Pizza](#) who now runs the bakery franchise

UT Dallas student Kristie Veal likes new adventures. “I like to know what lies ahead versus what’s familiar,” she said.

But the [Naveen Jindal School of Management](#) (JSOM) executive graduate student had never envisioned herself as a business trailblazer until a recent networking event inspired her to consider the possibilities.

The inaugural C-Level Dinner, held Nov. 11 at the school, introduced her to more than a dozen entrepreneurial executives seasoned in the travails and triumphs of launching their own companies.

“Listening to their stories is just inspiring,” Veal said midway through the event, which was sponsored by the [Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship \(IIE\) at UT Dallas](#) and the JSOM-based student [Entrepreneurship](#)



Kristie Veal

[Nothing Bundt Cakes](#). Burman said the businessman's insights were helpful because Burman is interested in franchising.

Jim Lafferty, founder and president of medical device company [Genesis Biosystems](#) in Lewisville, drew some of the biggest laughs of the evening.

His first youthful entrepreneurial effort's profit strategy was built on "zero cost of doing business." He sold squirrel tails to neighborhood kids for bicycle handlebar streamers, "25 cents for gray tails and 50 cents for red ones." His free supplier was his grandfather, a West Virginia coal miner who shot squirrels for food.

Pedigo watched as executive graduate student Keith V. Otto and John Jagers, a partner in the Dallas-based venture capital firm [Sevin Rosen Funds](#), had a discussion. Unable to pause the conversation, Pedigo was pleased. "This is really good. This is what we wanted – real networking."

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