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Hiking and Helping: Student Business Produces Outdoor Gear

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- He saw a need and made a business to fulfill it. Gabe Chester, a senior global business and marketing major from Fairfield, Ohio, realized there were no ultralight, high-quality economical camping sleeping bags available in the marketplace, so he began making and selling his own.

Today, this fulfilled need has turned into Chester Outdoor Gear, which provides consumers with quality outdoor gear for the avid, everyday adventurer.

Chester is an avid backpacker, Eagle Scout and outdoorsman. He makes the majority of his company's products himself to ensure the highest quality, and makes sure each item is field tested to the proper conditions.

As a student at Cedarville University, Chester started this business to provide the most durable outdoor gear for those who could not afford high-priced gear. Chester Outdoor Gear sells sleeping bags, canvas phone/passport cases, grommet socks (socks with a built in grommet to hang over the fire or from a backpack), wool-knit hats and logo patches.

"When I was looking to buy a sleeping bag for myself, I could not find any quality and affordable options," said Chester. "I stumbled on materials that I could use to make one for a much cheaper cost, so I hand sewed the first one. It took me 13 hours, but it turned out so well that I decided to purchase a sewing machine and make more bags."

Chester, now in his senior year at Cedarville, just hired an employee to help with the sewing. Chester, however, still plans on keeping a close eye on the quality of each product he sells.

All of Chester's sleeping bags weigh 1 1/2 pounds. They are lightweight because, as Chester said, "when hiking, every ounce that you carry counts." Each bag is made with down (duck feathers) and keeps a person warm in temperatures as low as 40 degrees.

"Our company realizes that people are far more important than profits," said Chester. "We aim to help get everyone outdoors. A business should always be focused on bettering the lives of their customers."

After graduation, Chester will work for Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in logistics and military sales. He plans to run Chester Outdoor Gear on the side and would someday like it to become his primary job. He wants to eventually morph it into a leadership roadtripping camp, for which he would provide camping gear for youth. His plan includes campers taking a road trip, stopping at national parks in the western United States and learning leadership principles.

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,193 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and leading student satisfaction ratings. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.