USC Students Get Help Selling Ideas
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Technical Savvy

When Mark A. Stevens was an engineering student at the University of Southern California, starting a megacompany was nothing but a far-off dream. These days, that's Mr. Stevens's day job. A general partner at Silicon Valley's Sequoia Capital, Mr. Stevens's is the firm that helped jump-start Yahoo Inc. and Google Inc., to name just two.

Now, Mr. Stevens and his wife, Mary, are donating $22 million to create an institute at USC that will commercialize technology innovations and teach students business basics. The idea is to build a universitywide resource that Mr. Stevens says will help students in engineering, business, the sciences plus other disciplines, like cinema, learn the basics of how to start a company. Mr. Stevens says it's important for graduate students and faculty to find answers to the question: How do I make this thing I developed on campus help people? "A lot of time they are not equipped to think about the possibilities of what they can do with their core technology and dream the dream and build a company that can help thousands," he says.

The new Mark and Mary Stevens Institute for Technology Commercialization, or SITeC as it will be called, will be housed in USC's Viterbi School of Engineering. C.L. Max Nikias, dean of the engineering school, says the institute will help students become technologically savvy and give USC a leg up as a research institution -- not to mention a global competitive boost.

As research and development shifts away from corporations and back to universities, it is critical that students and faculty be able to move their ideas to the marketplace, Dean Nikias says. "Technical innovation, if you get it quickly into the marketplace, creates new products and new jobs and new skills. It is the only way the U.S. economy will remain competitive," he says.

Just Deserts

Oracle Corp.'s Larry Ellison races sleek sailboats in the America's Cup. Vanguard Integrity Professionals Corp.'s Ronn Bailey will be racing a custom-built dune buggy in the equivalent event in off-