

You're overdrawn! Banker Hale does the Donald in Towson contest

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The Donald, meet The Edwin.

Banker and real estate developer Edwin F. Hale Sr. will be the central character in a Towson University contest modeled on "The Apprentice," the NBC reality television show starring New York real estate mogul and hairstyle trendsetter Donald Trump.

"The Associate" will feature two teams of seniors selected from Towson University's College of Business and Economics that will face off weekly, tackling business cases submitted by area companies.

Hale, chairman and CEO of First Mariner Bancorp, will fire contestants weekly until a winner emerges. "The Associate" gets a job with Hale's company.

Towson University marketing professor Laleh Malek uses "The Apprentice" as a teaching tool and sees the contest as a way for the business school's top soon-to-be-graduating seniors to show their stuff to some of Baltimore's top employers.

More than 15 companies submitted business cases to contest organizers this week. A faculty committee will pick five covering marketing, management, finance, e-business and accounting.

No word yet on Hale's catchphrase, but given his background and array of interests -- indoor soccer, cruise ship terminals -- we'd like to suggest:

"You're insolvent."

"You're offside."

"You're overdrawn."

"You're setting sail."

We'd also suggest a more flamboyant haircut.

Marriner gets sweet ad deal

The low-carbohydrate craze has led consumers to reach for the sugar substitutes in the grocery aisles. Is it long before we here the catchphrase "Splenda and spice and everything nice?"

The Sugar Association Inc. is launching a counterattack against the negative publicity blaming sugar for Americans' expanding waistlines. The group will spend \$10.5 million over the next three years on a print and broadcast advertising campaign. And it has hired Columbia's Marriner Marketing Communications Inc. over firms in New York and San Francisco to wage the media battle.

This marks the largest ad campaign in 10 years for the Sugar Association. The Washington group saw how advertising has boosted sales of milk and beef, said Melanie Miller, a spokeswoman. Sugar sales dipped 4 percent in 2004 versus 2003.

"We want to stop the downward [sales] decline and give consumers permission to use sugar again," Miller said.

Although the groups have not finalized their advertising plans, they say they want to convey that sugar only has 15 calories per teaspoon and that inactivity -- not sugar -- is to blame for the growing obesity problem.

"Sugar has been around for hundreds of years and people have just gotten obese in the last decade or two," said Carol Whitman, director of business development at Marriner.

The Sugar Association's budget is not big enough to employ celebrities sporting a "sugar mustache." But Miller promises the campaign will be "catchy and memorable."

A new take on turkey leftovers

Since 1986, Hogan & Hartson partner Jay Gede has worked on energy and project finance. He worked on some unusual deals -- such as power plants that ran on garbage and sludge -- and got some funny nicknames, like "Trash King," from his co-workers.

But Gede entered a whole new realm in 1999, when he began working on development and financing for the nation's first power plant run on turkey waste. He -- and we -- will leave his latest nickname to your imagination.

Gede, who led a team of more than 50 Hogan & Hartson lawyers on the deal, helped line up \$200 million in debt financing. They had to persuade doubtful lenders and a debt rating agency that turkey-litter technology could work. They did so: Insurance companies, including Metropolitan Life, Prudential, and John Hancock purchased the debt.

The 50-megawatt power plant in Benson, Minn., provides energy to 55,000 homes. Fibrowatt LLC, the plant's developer, operates three British plants that run on poultry litter.

Why poultry litter? The short answer, according to Gede: It's clean-burning, there's plenty of it, and this keeps it from ending up as runoff.

A poultry litter power plant on Maryland's Eastern Shore -- where chicken production plays a major economic role -- might not be out of the question. Gede said Fibrowatt officials have talked with Gov. Robert Ehrlich's office and state Del. Rudy Cane over the past year.

We always suspected the chickens would eventually run things.

Robert J. Terry, Julekha Dash and Rachel Sams contributed to this report.