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WELL WON – APPONEQUET STUDENTS TAKE FIRST IN INTERNATIONAL EVENT

LAKEVILLE – Apponequet marketing students took first place in the Virtual Business Challenge in Dallas at DECA'S 2006 International Career Development Conference.

DECA is a student membership organization dedicated to fostering careers in marketing, management and entrepreneurship.

Calling themselves "Slow Riders," Doug Hagerty, Mike Mackiewicz and Ben Nicholas – all of Lakeville – earned record profits with their virtual sports franchise, using simulation software introduced by Knowledge Matters, Inc. of Northampton in March 2005.

The team members beat 1,500 other teams from across the nation, earning \$1,000 for their achievement.

Three months after Knowledge Matters published its first educational simulation (Virtual Business – Retailing) in 1999, DECA invited the new company to run an online virtual business competition as part of the association's menu of 50 events.

"It was very popular from the start and inspired students to stretch beyond the classroom to 24/7 learning," said Ed Davis, executive director of DECA.

Knowledge Matters' founder, Harvard MBA Pete Jordan, discovered students were posting qualifying scores as late as 2 a.m. from home. He admires the dedication of the teams, he said.

"Last year, we had a student who couldn't stop playing," said teacher Frank Rosa, whose two Apponequet teams placed first and fourth in the sports division of the Virtual Business Challenge this year.

"A group of them were at someone's house on a Saturday night to watch a big pay-per-view fight, but this student was on the computer competing." The fourth-place team members, earning \$100, were Andy Bartsch of Lakeville and Tyler Hutchens of East Freetown.

When Knowledge Matters Inc. started running the Virtual Business Challenge for DECA in 2000, simulations became a major component of DECA's competitions. With two month-long online qualifying rounds for the Virtual Business Challenge prior to the nationals, tens of thousands of students over the past five years have spent time competing – and learning – far beyond the annual three-day conferences, said Knowledge Matters Vice President of Marketing Eric Olsson.

Rosa procured the Virtual Business – Sports software for his classes this year to add to the Virtual Business – Retailing he’s been using for the previous year. To prepare for the Virtual Business Challenge, he said his students learned to develop pricing, promotion, merchandising and market research strategies for their virtual sports franchises and retailing businesses. How much profit they are able to turn each time gives them the feedback they need to master the principles of business, he said.

Team member Hagerty said the Slow Riders “developed some of our own strategies that helped us gain commanding advantages against our fellow opponents.” The team won the finals with a score of roughly \$3.4 million – an amazing victory after all that travel and work, agreed Nicholas and Mackiewicz.