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Jonah Perron (clockwise from bottom), Eric Steinke and Ian Willison will each receive \$2,000 scholarships, and they collected \$1,500 more in prizes, after the business plan for their company Beyond VR wowed in Winnipeg on Friday.

Trio of Grade 12 students take top prize at New Venture Championships

Teens' public speaking tool wins big

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PUBLIC speaking during a presentation may be the bane of many students' existence, but it's fodder for the futures of three St. Paul's High School students.

Jonah Perron, Ian Willison and Eric Steinke each won \$2,000 scholarships after their business plan for their company Beyond VR earned the top prize on Friday at the Manitoba High School New Venture Championships at the University of Manitoba's Stu Clark Centre for Entrepreneurship.

The scholarships are for any post-secondary school in Manitoba.

The Grade 12 trio also won the

Top School prize of \$1,000 and placed first in the Trade Show competition, winning a \$500 group prize.

Their business is a multi-faceted virtual reality (VR) learning tool to help people improve their public speaking abilities and delivery of presentations.

"We've all had to do our share of presentations in school and we figured it's something everybody has to deal with at some point," Perron said.

"Public speaking is the number one fear in the world and the best way to overcome it is through practice and we make practising fun, easily accessible, convenient. It's a great stepping stone for training for this important skill."

The New Venture Championships included about 90 students from 12 high schools across Manitoba competing as individuals or in teams in four categories.

There were cash prizes or gift cards from \$50 to \$500 for first through

fourth places in the Trade Show, Idea Pitch and Logo competitions.

In addition to the Beyond VR team's scholarships, the Business Plan competition included individual scholarships of \$1,000 for second place for up to five team members and \$500 for third place. Fourth place earned a group \$250 scholarship.

The event has been held every May for about a decade as a platform for the U of M to encourage and support youth entrepreneurs to put their ideas into action.

"The event is to inspire students to see that you can be an entrepreneur at any age," said Amy Briscoe, the Stu Clark Centre for Entrepreneurship's program co-ordinator. "You see the students in this competition and they're actually selling their products. They have so much passion and they believe in their product and that's something that sells the most. People

can tell a phony sales pitch, but these students wear their hearts on their sleeves. The feedback from the judges is also so valuable to them."

The Beyond VR business features a website at beyondvr.ca, an app that functions with both iPhones and Android devices and a setup package called a Public Speaking Took Kit, which includes items such as a VR headset, in-depth video lessons and exercises, a progress tracker and VR app code for a cost of \$94.95. The app is free to use for those who already own a VR headset.

"You put on the headset and then you can upload your own slideshow or script into it to prepare for an upcoming presentation," Steinke said.

"We're also working on an experiences section where you can practice for a job interview, project pitch, valedictorian speech. If you don't have a presentation to give, you can do an

impromptu speech where we give you a topic to speak about for two minutes."

Perron, Willison and Steinke have known each other and attended the same schools since kindergarten. All three will be attending the U of M this fall with Perron and Willison studying at the Asper School of Business and Steinke studying computer science. Since they'll all be at the U of M, their plan is to continue working together and growing the business.

"We're already up and running. We've got customers in New York, Toronto, North Dakota and Winnipeg. For the app itself, we're in 146 countries," Willison said, noting they've been in business for about a year.

Judges for the four competitions included a wide range of established business professionals from across Manitoba.

ashley.prest@freepress.mb.ca