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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cal Poly Planning Grads Enter 'Real World' With 'Virtual' Success

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Two Cal Poly city and regional planning students are about to enter the so-called real world with their feet successfully planted in the virtual one.

Jason Gavin and Andrew Rubin are the creators of VirtualSLO.com, an award-winning Web site that gives tourists, property buyers, shoppers and others 360-degree looks at scenic and business locations throughout the county.

Gavin, from San Diego, and Rubin, from Malibu, began creating their interactive "visual guide to the Central Coast" in 2001 while pursuing undergraduate study. As they get ready to receive their bachelor's degrees -- Rubin this Saturday, Gavin early next year -- the pair are guiding a business with several employees and a growing client list.

Among their several awards, the one VirtualSLO's founders are most proud of is winning second place earlier this year in a five-state student entrepreneurial leadership competition sponsored by Loyola Marymount University. They won third in the 2003 Ray Scherr Business Plan Competition sponsored by Cal Poly's Orfalea College of Business.

City and Regional Planning Department Head William Siembieda gives the pair high marks for combining their education with commercial applications.

"In city and regional planning we speak about 'visual communication' as a core planning skill," Siembieda said. "Andy and Jason have taken this concept and applied it to grow their own business. They used technical skills and conceptual ideas from their courses and successfully fused them into a digital product that people are using and clients are paying for. They deliver visual information about places and spaces that is useful and practical.

"We hope," he said, "that other students will have the similar dedication and creativity to take a chance, do something different, and have fun at it."

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