

## NUS team gets a helping hand from alumnus

BY SHOBANA KESAVA

AN ENGINEER trained at the National University of Singapore (NUS) has taken time off from his successful business in the United States to help students of his alma mater emulate his success.

Mr Robin Low, 32 – who has made his mark in the business of marketing innovative products based on nanotechnology – is the CEO of Greenyarn, a company which manufactures fabric that has minute particles of bamboo charcoal in its weave.

The product absorbs odours and has anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties.

A group of seven NUS students seized on the chance to work with Greenyarn, and spent the last six months developing new product ideas.

Two inventions using the company's fabric have caught Mr Low's eye.

One invention is a sleeping pack, which combines the cumbersome essentials of a backpack and a sleeping bag for mountaineers. Twenty-two-year-old student Ang Kheng Wee is enthusiastic about his team's invention.

"I was in an NUS mountaineering programme, so I hope to see less synthetic materials used in exploring caves for instance. If we can actually incorporate more eco-friendly products I



PHOTO: MAY LIN LE GOFF

**INNOVATIVE TEAM EFFORT:** Mr Low (holding the yarn) and third-year mechanical engineering students (from left) Tan Wei Yong, 24; Willy Zhang, 23; team leader Nicholas Ang, 24; and Ang Kheng, 22; with the changeable slippers, the bamboo charcoal and the fabric in their hands.



**COOL GEAR:** The sleeping pack combines the essentials of a backpack and a sleeping bag.

think it would suit the label better."

The other prototype is for a pair of changeable slippers, which will allow consumers to create three different looks, simply by adjusting the straps.

Professor Lai Man On, the team's supervisor, believes it will appeal to the cost-conscious. "You can get your money's worth since you are buying essentially more than one pair."

Speaking to The Straits Times, Mr Low, who graduated from the NUS in 2000, emphasised the importance of marketing.

"Thomas Edison might have come up with the light bulb but it was General Electric that made it marketable. It's got to be more than just about a project but

what is useful and commercially viable and this should give them a better idea of what the working world is looking for."

Another idea that has not quite taken off with Mr Low is a hamster wheel made of Greenyarn's fabric. It is meant to reduce the odour emitted by these popular pets. Still, the students are hopeful that another entrepreneur will spot their ingenuity in the near future and team up with them to develop this novel idea.

In the meantime, Mr Low – who is based in Boston – is working with manufacturers in Taiwan and expects to have changeable slippers and the sleeping pack in the market in Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong next year.