

The Daily Pennsylvanian

Published on *The Daily Pennsylvanian* (<http://www.thedp.com>)

Making shoes to make a difference

Wednesday, October 7, 2009 at 9:23 pm

[Nathan Werksman](#) [1]

By making shoes and making a difference, Tal Dehtiar is working to make “profit with a purpose.”

Last night, PennSEM and the Wharton Ethics Program hosted the founder of non-profit organization MBAs Without Borders and footwear company Oliberte to speak to students about social responsibility in business.

MBAs Without Borders sends MBAs to developing nations, while Oliberte is the first footwear company to make shoes exclusively in Africa.

Dehtiar, a Canadian national, said he completed business school knowing only that he wanted to focus on “doing well and doing good.” His parents, immigrants from Eastern Europe who created a successful small business in Canada, served as his inspiration.

His research on the importance of small business to thriving economies led him to discover a nearly complete absence of small businesses in economically struggling nations.

Under the notion that developing nations needed “trade not aid,” Dehtiar founded MBAs Without Borders in 2004 to help small businesses develop, become profitable and improve communities. He was driven by his belief that by supporting local business, his impact would be perpetual.

“It’s inspiring to see these people who are actually being citizens of the world and putting others before their primary benefit,” said first-year Wharton MBA student Matt Kardel.

Funded by donations and several corporate sponsorships, MBAs Without Borders sent volunteers to 25 countries, from Pakistan to Swaziland, to help grow local businesses.

However, after the economic downturn last year and continued governmental scrutiny regarding the organization’s non-profit, tax-exempt status, MBAs Without Borders was absorbed by CDC Development Solutions.

But Dehtiar still strives make a difference.

After CDC's acquisition of MBA Without Borders, Dehtiar followed his principle that "business can do amazing things" and started Oliberte. Dehtiar's goals, though, haven't changed.

"I, personally, don't care about shoes," he said. "I want people to have jobs for the rest of their lives."

Although Dehtiar, the sole owner of Oliberte, is still working on the logistics of his new business, the company is introducing its new line of shoes this fall.

"What we want to do is show students at Penn that there are ways to apply education and skills to creating positive social change," said Wharton senior and president of PennSEM Nadia Anggraini. "Tal exemplifies that."

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10/08/2009

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