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Southern Oregon honors graduate for inventiveness

By Vicki Guarino
of the Mail Tribune

ASHLAND — A 1984 business graduate waging patent-infringement battles against some of the nation's biggest telecommunications companies is being honored today as Southern Oregon University's distinguished alumni. Daniel Henderson, 38, will receive the award during a dinner after SOU's homecoming game.

Henderson graduated in 1984 and runs a communications technology company, PhoneTel Communications of Fort Worth, Texas.

SOU alumni relations director Jean Calvo said Henderson is being recognized for his efforts and success in business and for his interest in serving the university.

"His loyalties and his interests really appealed to us," Calvo said.

The festivities will be just a brief interlude for the Medford native, who lives in San Francisco and runs his company in Texas. Henderson is due in federal court in Dallas, Texas, Monday, to pursue his company's patent claims.

Consumers may take for granted the technology behind telephone features such as caller identification, but Henderson said the companies selling those services should respect the patent rights of his late mentor, a California inventor. Henderson said he is trying to honor the legacy of inventor Kazuo Hashimoto.

Some companies have settled with PhoneTel and pay royalties, Henderson said Friday, but litigation

against AT&T and other companies continues.

Henderson first sought out Hashimoto in 1993, after learning of many patents Hashimoto held for telecommunications devices, including one of the earliest answering machines. The elderly inventor helped Henderson with his device to record a caller's name on phone pagers.

A relationship developed. Hashimoto died in 1995 and had willed his patents to Henderson's PhoneTel, with Hashimoto's widow a majority owner.

Henderson began the legal effort to enforce patent rights.

"I'm honoring his legacy and continuing his work and his vision," Henderson said.

Primarily, Henderson said, he is an inventor. Since graduating in 1984, Henderson has worked for IBM and obtained patents for his own devices.

He said his college experience — in the classroom and working full time to pay expenses — led directly to his business successes.

"It instilled a serious work ethic that has really helped me a lot in my business and my personal life. I think that has helped more than anything else," Henderson said.

He said he has stayed in touch with some professors over the years, but hadn't been involved in SOU activities until late last year. He learned of the university's \$11.6 million visual arts center project and signed on as a contributor.

He said he wants to do more now to help the university.



Henderson