The Race Is On

Connecticut Democratic Sen. Joseph Lieberman, who is in a heat with Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry and seven other Democratic presidential contenders for the hearts and wallets of Silicon Valley, won some key endorsements from the technology crowd.

Leading the list of 12: John Doerr, the Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers venture capitalist who backed Al Gore in the past presidential ground. "Joe Lieberman gets it," Mr. Doerr says. He praised the senator's proposals to spur high-tech industry tax credits to encourage research and development, and information-technology spending, along with capital gains tax rate relief for new investments in start-ups. "He truly understands how our innovation economy works," Mr. Doerr says.

Mr. Kerry, meanwhile, who has been busy cultivating the technology crowd for months, has garnered his own share of Silicon Valley support and money with help from among others, Mark Gorenberg, a partner with Hummer Winblad Venture Partners.

Donnie Fowler, a vice president of Democratic outreach at the public-policy organization TechNet, says, "Sen. Kerry has visited the Valley more than any other candidate in the last two years and it's paid off." So far, he says, the Massachusetts senator is ahead in the California money race. He has developed a tremendous list that other candidates should be envious of," Mr. Fowler says.

Author, Author

The outspoken Larry Ellison will have the last word in a forthcoming book viewed as an "intimate portrait" of the chief executive of Oracle Corp. and his company. Mr. Ellison is scribbling comments on a 500-page manuscript, tentatively titled "Softwar," under an unusual arrangement with author Matthew Symonds that allows Mr. Ellison to add footnotes at the bottom of each page. Mr. Symonds, an editor at the Economist magazine, says his agent, Andrew Wylie, came up with the idea to give Mr. Ellison a chance to add his "taste in University." Still, he adds, 

Innovation Lives

Pleasant influence still are enthusiastically out there drumming up business plans in search of money. Just consider the roster of proposals that came out of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to Wake Forest for investors' big bucks. At Columbia University, the Graduate School of Business' Outrageous Business Plan competition turned into outrageous money.

Earlier this spring, potential MBA's tossed out "outrageous" ideas in two-minute "elevator pitches," which they practiced and videotaped while standing in an elevator. The idea: to get it all down and out in the two minutes taking an elevator to get from Floor A to Floor Z and back.

Ideas ranged from hockey player Aaron Foester's pitch for a new twin-ring ice-skating rink, to Cedric Pletcher's sports brand for urban sportswear, to "Chop!" Mindy Cohen's cooking school for young, hip New Yorkers.

All three wannabe entrepreneurs won $5000 for their "outrageous" ideas, then went on to become finalists in Columbia's "real" business-school contest. The three split $250,000 provided by the Lang Fund with two other teams. Ordinarily the outrageous entrants "wouldn't pass screening," says Alexander Johnson, a newly minted M.B.A. who helped coordinate the tongue-in-cheek program. "In this case, the outrageous idea became a real idea."

Potent Patents

General Magic Inc. was one of Silicon Valley's most famous flops. But some of the moribund start-up's ideas were far-reaching, and they may find a new life--courtesy of two of Microsoft Corp.'s former top technologists.

Intellectual Ventures LLC, a technology development and licensing start-up formed by Microsoft veterans Nathan Myhrvold and Edward Jung, has won the bidding for General Magic Patents.

Carriers Pitch

PHONE CARRIERS and equipment makers are trying to perk up the fixed-line telephone market by copying some of cellular's hottest selling points.

They are offering home and office handsets modeled after cellphones, with features including big contact lists, lots of options accessible by on-screen menus, and even special ring tones. The carriers are hammering wireless-inspired services to match.

Among the latest offerings: text messaging on home telephones. Millions of consumers, mostly in Europe and Asia, already send short messages between their wireless handsets. While the U.S. has been slower to catch on, it is a phenomenon around the world, with a legal means of demanding divorce in Dubai, used to transmit sermon excerpts by a church in Germany and credited with spreading the word for the 2001 uprising that unseated the president of the Philippines. New York research firm Frost & Sullivan estimates such messages brought in $1.5 billion to operators worldwide last year. Nearly 10% of European wireless carriers' total revenue comes from text messaging fees, on average.

That is an attractive market in the eyes of Europe's fixed-line operators, which have seen fees to cell carriers drop to a few cents a year. The operator's percent of the market trickles--surveys suggest--in text messages, a have fueled the