It’s a story made for Hollywood:

An engineering student stumbles across a notice about an international rocket competition and casually asks roommates if they want to build a rocket. The roommates collectively respond, “Cool! We’re in!”

Word gets around and soon, there’s a team of more than 40 students — not all of them majoring in engineering — all excited to make a rocket.

There was only one problem: None of them had any experience designing or building one, let alone a 10-foot-tall, 50-pound, solid-fuel, Level III rocket capable of reaching 10,000 feet while carrying a payload of at least 10 pounds.

“Our team’s main hurdle was the fact that none of us had done anything like this before,” says mechanical engineering major Michael VanderPutten.

Undeterred, the team took on a Herculean task of countless meetings, research in libraries and labs, hands-on testing and retesting, successes and setbacks.

Whitney Hopple, a University Honors College student majoring in mechanical engineering and international studies, says she will never forget the late nights working in the lab. “Even at the most difficult moments, someone would make a joke, we’d all have another Red Bull and enjoy staying up another few hours until the job was done,” she says. “No one ever lost sight of the end goal.”

Nine months later, they were ready for the ESRA Intercollegiate Rocket Engineering Competition in the desert near Green River, Utah. And that ad hoc team of rocket scientists beat 22 other teams from around the world with an almost perfect launch of 10,280 feet, taking home the $1,000 prize in the Basic Category. Some, including Michael and Whitney, parlayed the experience into internships at SpaceX, NASA Ames and Boeing.

This was no Hollywood movie — it’s a true story that happened at Oregon State University.