

Class helps young entrepreneurs

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Paige Janis, a Hilton High School senior, has always had a different view of fashion than most teenage girls.

Instead of feminine colors and preppy cuts, she's always been drawn to alternative fashions like Goth, punk and emo — fashions she thinks symbolize power and independence for women.

But finding these styles hasn't been easy. So she learned how to design and sew them for herself. She's taken three sewing classes and is a member of the American Sewing Guild.

It's been the impetus to start a fashion business, Lilac Shock Clothing. It's ambitious for a high school student, but she's getting some help through the Young Entrepreneurs Academy, an after school program at Greece Athena High School, open also to Hilton High students.

Originally funded by the Greece school system, budget cuts threatened to end the program last year. But the Greece Chamber of Commerce stepped up and found the money to make it happen. The class

learn about entrepreneurship, but all the students launch real businesses by year-end.

"At first I had no clue what I needed to do," says Janis. "This is just giving me a well-structured list of steps to take. I'm finding it really helpful."

There are 10 students in this year's program working on projects that range from babysitting services to selling reduced-priced wheelchairs. They workshop ideas, write mission statements, build business plans, work out detailed financial models and implement marketing strategies.

The program runs with the help of volunteer mentors. Business leaders from around the community work one-on-one with the students and also give presentations on various business topics and obstacles. For example, Keith Rockcastle of Rockcastle Florist in Greece recently spoke to the students about e-commerce and website design and implementation. Each student builds a website for their business.

When all the legwork is done, they present to



MARIE DE JESUS staff photographer
A program for young entrepreneurs is helping Paige Janis's fashion business get off the ground.

comprised of area business leaders) and receive real dollars to get started. Students have received anywhere from \$300 to \$3,000.

The class in Greece is just one in a network of Young Entrepreneur Academy classes that go on throughout New York state and Illinois. It started with a class at the University of Rochester in 2004. Currently, the Young Entrepreneur Academy organization hosts 22 locations, and hopes to reach 300 high schools and 300 colleges over the next five years.

Gayle Jagel, the director of the YEA organiza-

the step-by-step process and the support. Both of those pieces are necessary for the launch of an enterprise."

She never sees the same project twice.

"Our definition of entrepreneurship is the transformation of an idea into an enterprise that creates value," says Jagel.

"For students, they might see value as solving a social issue and being an agent of social change. Or want value as financial and dollars. Or see it as cultural, and want to create cultural representation of values."

Creativity and natural problem solving defines the students in the program. One past YEA student, Kerry Huang, created her business Scentsations out of an annoyance that her perfumes wouldn't last all day. She reached out to an overseas manufacturer and developed her product. Her business, started in 2008, is still running.

For the budding Lilac Shock Clothing's CEO, Janis' latest sewn skirts came from a fabric meant for Halloween, a dark red layer covered by a black, netted material with oc-

used a traditional pattern, but changed it slightly to make a tight-fitting skirt that sits a little over her knees. It's a regular skirt, but the material makes a statement.

The ideas have come easily, but Janis has found that building a business is a detailed process.

"At first the workload seemed really overwhelming," she says. "It takes a lot of time and effort."

She's had to spend time researching fabric manufacturers to find the most competitive prices. And building a financial model has been difficult because the price of materials

varies so much. But for marketing, she's already plotting ways to reach clubs and concerts that cater to the 16-and-up set. She's also thinking of starting an alternative beauty pageant to help get her name out and support a well-rounded view of beauty. The pageants will ultimately raise money for charity causes.

It's a good start — and she's motivated to see it through.

"It's really amazing," she says. "I feel really official. I plan to continue it for as long as I can." □