

Program shows teens the business world's ropes

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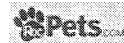
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A graduate of the Greece Chamber of Commerce Young Entrepreneur Academy, Stephanie Krist, 18, of Greece, is the CEO of Kard Karisma, a hand-crafted greeting card company. Krist, who will be attending Nazareth College in the fall for art education, looks to use the business as an added stream of income while in school. Kate Melton / Kate Melton

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Written by Meaghan M. McDermott

Recent Greece Athena High School graduate Stephanie Krist has spent the past year honing her business acumen.

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An accomplished student and musician, Stephanie heads to Nazareth College this fall to begin her studies in art education. She'll have one credential that makes her stand out among her classmates: small business owner.

Stephanie, 18, is one of seven high school students to complete this year's Young Entrepreneurs Academy offered by the Greece Chamber of Commerce. Stephanie's start-up is a handmade greeting card company called Kard Karisma.

"I came into the program with one idea for a business and that didn't work out, so we brainstormed our strengths and interests and I came up with the greeting cards," she said. Her initial idea

was a website to match college roommates based on personality. She said sites such as Uroomsurf.com, however, seemed to have the market cornered.

Instead, Stephanie turned to one of her hobbies: she's been an avid scrapbooker and rubber-stamp aficionado since she was 8 or so, and has always been enlisted to create unique greeting and holiday cards for her family members. "I wanted to transfer my hobby and passion into a business."

Get to know Stephanie Krist

What she'd say to those considering the academy: "I'd tell them to persevere through it — we had almost half of our class drop out — and that you really have to want it to get into it. Even if it is overwhelming, or too much work, it's worth it in the end because then you feel accomplished and proud of yourself."

What she's reading: *Wise Man's Fear* by Patrick Rothfuss. "I really like the author's writing. There's never any dry spells in it. He's done a good job at creating a believable world."

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For three hours each week during this school year, Greece's academy participants vetted ideas, brainstormed, met with business mentors, and listened to success and failure stories from small business owners. Then, they had to put together businesses plans and present the idea to investors.

Stephanie, who was consistently on her high school's high honor roll with distinction and graduated with valedictory honors, received \$835 in start-up money from her investors — more than the \$735 she'd requested.

This year's academy class started businesses that include service to help parents find baby sitters, an art company that held a gallery show in late June, and a consignment service to sell items on eBay. Students were from Athena and Hilton high schools.

So far with her business, Stephanie has participated in a trade show at Eastview Mall, started up an online store selling her cards on e-commerce website Etsy and had some of her graduation cards purchased for sale at Rockcastle Florist on Long Pond Road.

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Page 1 2 Next

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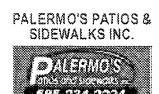
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"I make up all the cards on card stock paper using rubber stamps to make designs, then I use different paper layers, 3D layering and metal embellishments to make them unique," she said.

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Although sales haven't been overwhelming, it's the business experience she's gained that counts.

"It's definitely been a lot of work, but I think that anyone who is very passionate and has the time and energy to put into it can be successful," she said, adding that she's been able to see that first-hand watching her mother Joan Krist work as an independent consultant for collectibles manufacturer Longaberger.

"I grew up around entrepreneurship all my life," said Stephanie, the youngest of Joan and Peter Krist's two daughters. "I think that attracted me to the idea of starting my own business, and (the academy) provided me a good opportunity, for very little money, to be able to take classes and learn information adults would spend thousands of dollars to learn in seminars."

Jodie Perry, president of the Greece Chamber of Commerce, said the academy program is tailored to the spirit of self-reliance and entrepreneurship in young people.

"From a Chamber perspective, we want to encourage entrepreneurship as much as possible: you never know where the next Bill Gates or Tom Golisano will come from," she said. "Today's kids are growing up in tough times, and it excites them to see that they have the potential to shape their future by opening and owning their own business. The one they start with (the academy) may not be the business they retire with, but this gives them the skills and connections they will need."

The Young Entrepreneurs Academy program was launched at the University of Rochester in 2004 and has branched out to 18 school districts in New York and Illinois. Chambers of Commerce across the country have taken note of the program and this year's program in Greece was a pilot site for what organizers hope will become a national Chamber model.

Perry said Chambers and the academy program are a good fit.

"Chambers of Commerce have the connections in the community to get volunteers and business owners who are interested in investing in other small businesses," she said. "It's kind of exciting that Greece was the national pilot site."

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