

Students turn bright ideas into businesses

Young Entrepreneurs Academy hopes to expand nationwide

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Staff writer

Jason Shanley envisions high school hallways bursting with color, with each student's locker displaying a different design, logo or sports superstar on its exterior.

The senior at Ruben A. Cirillo High School in Gananda, Wayne County, earlier this year started selling vinyl locker covers through his business, UrLocker, and has made several hundred dollars.

And now, he's got a \$30,000 scholarship to go along with it.

Shanley was the winner of the Young Entrepreneurs Academy's Saunders Scholars Bright Ideas Competition, which took place at Rochester Institute of Technology on Friday evening.

"If someone were to decorate their locker, it would take an hour or two hours. These take 10, 15 minutes to set up," said Shanley, who has been selling the locker covers for \$29.99 and is hoping to secure licensing arrangements with sports leagues soon. "You'll definitely stand out to the rest of your school."

The competition, which has taken place annually for each of the past three years, awards RIT scholarships



Jason Shanley, a senior at Ruben A. Cirillo High School in Gananda, walked off with the top prize for his business idea: selling vinyl covers for high school lockers. MARIE DE JESUS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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Students

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to the students who create the top three business plans in YEA, an entrepreneurial program for middle- and high-school students. By the time the competition takes place, most of the students have already collected start-up capital and put their business plans into action.

Shanley's business plan was selected Friday from a group of five finalists, who themselves had been culled from the academy's 590 students. He said that the scholarship means he'll be able to attend RIT, which was his top college choice.

While the scholarship recipients had to win regional events and a semifinal to make it to Friday, the task will be even more difficult for next year's students. For the 2011-2012 school year, YEA is hoping to quadruple in size, said the academy's founder and CEO, Gayle Jagel.

Last year, the academy existed in 18 school districts throughout New York and Illinois, but chambers of commerce throughout the country have taken notice of the program, and YEA is partnering with many of them to bring the academy to dozens of new school districts.

The academy, which keeps track of its graduates, reports that 83 percent of its students continue the business they start in YEA for at least a year. And 18 percent of the graduates go on to start a second business, a number that could easily rise when the academy's more recent graduates leave college and start their careers.

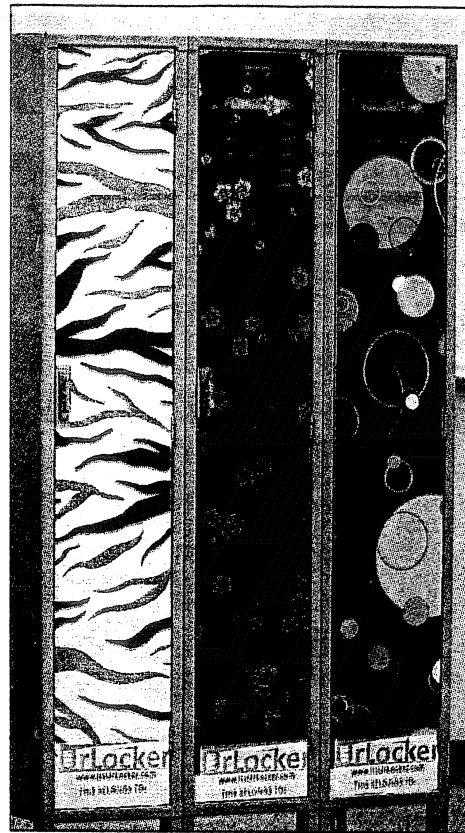
Eric Meyer, who is now a senior at the University of Rochester and went through YEA when he was a sophomore in high school, called it "the most life-changing program I've ever been a part of."

Meyer has since started two for-profit businesses, which he's run while keeping up with his college studies. The first was a video production company, and the second was a summer camp program for children in Geneseo.

"The biggest thing I got out of it was it taught me to believe in myself and that you can achieve anything you put your mind to, even at a young age," he said. "That's kind of a broad statement, but that's the biggest thing I left with."

Friday's competitors said they planned to continue their businesses.

Pavan Patel, a sophomore at Pittsford Sutherland High School, took second place and received a \$24,000 RIT scholarship. His business, Empire Engravers, makes custom sports memorabilia for area high



Samples of the locker covers Jason Shanley sells through his business. MARIE DE JESUS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

2011-2012 ENROLLMENT

The Young Entrepreneurs Academy is now accepting students for next year's class. The nine-month program begins in October and is for students in sixth through 12th grades. For more information, go to www.yeausa.org or call (585) 272-3535.

school students.

"I just love sports, but once you graduate ... you don't really get anything. You get a couple photos and that's it," said Patel, whose company sells engraved bats and custom-made footballs, among other things. "I looked around for this and it wasn't out there, and I wanted to provide it."

Ed Facer, a senior at Newark High School, won third place and a \$20,000 scholarship for his business, Burntwood Cattle Care.

Also participating in the finals were Leah Doerner, Karlene Gallese and Marissa Verdi, who are seniors at Webster Schroeder High School; and Justin Rea and Zach Zeh, seniors from Mohonasen High School in Schenectady. □

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