



## Young entrepreneurs pitch ideas in Bloomfield

Future business leaders

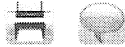
By **Scott Pukos, staff writer**

**Messenger Post**

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Bloomfield, N.Y. — At Bloomfield High School, some students are basketball stars, some are honor students and some are both.

A handful are CEOs.

Fifteen students set out to start their own companies as part of the Young Entrepreneurs Academy course. On March 23, they presented their business proposals to investors at the Bloomfield Performing Arts Center.

Young Entrepreneurs Academy is a full-year course that encourages business enterprise, innovation and ambition.

“The course is basically for these students to start their own business,” said Mark Jacobs, the instructor. The class “starts off with some brainstorming. We talk about business ideas and opportunities.

“Then they all focus on what they think their business idea is, then it walks them through step-by-step from beginning to end — from writing a business plan, costing your product, marketing and asking investors for money and putting their presentations together.”

Each student company presented a six-minute pitch to the panel of investors detailing their product, business plan and the money needed to move beyond the concept.

The investors put up \$700 each (the total pool was \$4,200), and although they each held the technical title of investor, the money they gave to the students was more charity than investment, said Bloomfield’s YEA project manager Pam Nakoski, who started to compile the list of investors over the summer. She targeted businesses and sent out invitations asking them to participate.

“A lot of (the investors) loved the idea of connecting the students to the business world,” she said.

“Many of them were entrepreneurs or small business owners themselves. They really liked the YEA program.”

Some companies were comprised of just one student, while others had several. The number was up to the students, said Jacobs. Each group received at least \$250 from the investors, but some got a lot more.

Senior Haley Zambito’s company, Alizabeth Sawyer, was spawned through helping another student formulate an idea. Zambito received \$925 from the investors (she had asked for \$660) and was chosen to represent Bloomfield at a regional competition at Rochester Institute of Technology.

The competition pits winning companies from this region against each other; the prize is a business scholarship through the Saunders College of Business at RIT. The semifinals of the competition are May 5, with the finals and announcement of the winner on May 6.

The products pitched included padded seats for sporting events, an auto-repair company, a used car dealership and detail shop, a company that manufactures snowboard bindings, a new board game, a sports apparel retailer and an athletic tape company.

Zambito said she couldn’t disclose specific details about her product — it’s a fashion accessory targeted for teens — because of a pending patent. She liked the course.

“The class was fun,” she said. “It helps set us up for the future.”

Jake Warner, an economics teacher at BHS who was master of ceremonies at the panel event, agreed.

“If you look at the economy now,” he said, “it’s great to have kids looking to make their own money.”

The class was more than just coming up with an idea and pitching it to investors, though. Nakoski, who’s also a school board member, helped organize events to give the students as much business experience as possible.

They included guest speakers (attorneys, accounting, insurance and banking professionals), field trips and delving into every aspect of business including e-commerce and niche marketing.

So what’s next for these young CEOs?

“They’re going to go out and start their businesses,” said Jacobs. “Some of these kids have come up with an idea that they really want to go through with. They want to walk out of here, run a business and make some money.”

This is Bloomfield’s first year participating in the business program, and plans are to continue it next year, said Jacobs. Young Entrepreneurs Academy was created in 2004 at the University of Rochester, and other high schools that have participated include Geneva, Midlakes, Greece, Naples and Penn Yan.

Jacobs offered some advice for future academy students.

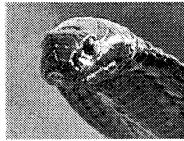
“I told the kids, it’s like eating an elephant,” he said. “You do it one bite at a time.”

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