

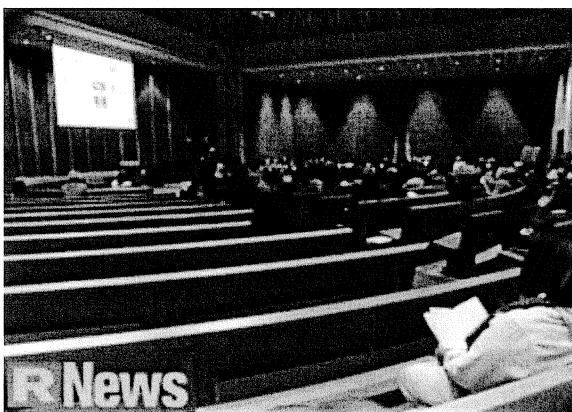
Young Entrepreneurs Shine

by Casey J. Bortnick
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Even as economic leaders encourage Americans to start their own businesses, the number of new small businesses continues to decline.

One local program is working to reverse that trend one young entrepreneur at a time.

"It's like a hook. You want to develop a hook that will help you stand out from your competition," said Joe Eckert. Eckert is not your average high school junior.



Young Entrenuers Academy at U of R.

At the age of 16 he's the C.E.O of his own online business, a website he hopes will connect teens with businesses who need them.

"Most jobs are out there for people that have high school diplomas are 18 years old. So we wanted to offer a place where teens can get jobs at a younger age and learn some things that will help them in their career later on," he added.

Eckert is just one of 25 middle and high school students enrolled in the Young Entrepreneurs Academy. Once a week these young people come to the University of Rochester to learn how to start a business.

"We take students through the process of selecting an idea, said YEA! Founder Gayle Jagel. "It allows them to developing a business plan, pitch to potential investors and then launch a real business," Jagel said.

The year long program does not provide kids with college credit. It does give kids a chance to create real companies and pitch their idea to real businesses with real bank accounts.

"It helps to educate them at a very young age in the business world how you approach people. How you present your idea, so it's a fabulous experience for them. It's a wonderful program," said Terrence Rafferty, president of Time Warner Cable in Rochester.

Rafferty and the rest of the panel were so impressed with the students. All eleven presentations received the funding needed to get their businesses off the ground. TeenWorkConnections received an extra 600 dollars for best concept.

Joe says the key was to make these investors believe in him.

"How to get people to understand your concept and how to show that your concept is better than any other out there," Eckert said.