

CEHS News

University of Nebraska—Lincoln College of Education and Human Sciences Alumni Newsletter Winter 2009

Youths dream big, create businesses from bratwurst to baseball

A bratwurst business in Cedar Rapids, Neb., and a cupcake company in nearby Fullerton are two of the real-life businesses developed by young people through a new 4-H EntrepreneurShip Investigation program.

The young people, however, didn't confine their entrepreneurial interests to food. One created a technology-based company that arranges transactions between buyers and sellers on e-Bay. His clients are all over the world.

Two young boys at a summer 4-H camp at Butler County invented a baseball pitching trainer that allows players to practice pitching on their own without anyone retrieving the thrown balls.

Their company is called Smokin' Aces. Other young entrepreneurs decorated flip-flops to sell at a water park, and a young photographer used her artistry to produce striking photographs of Nebraska cornfields.

"A professional photographer could not have taken any better picture," said Diane Vigna, associate professor and extension specialist in the CEHS Department of Textiles, Clothing and Design.

The EntrepreneurShip Investigation

program helps rural youth see local businesses that exist and new opportunities that are as different from the mainstream as possible so they can see that they can come back to their rural communities. There are programs to help businesses develop in the state—and this one starts with youth—to help rural places maintain their populations and economic potential.

Research by two UNL economists showed that 65 percent of the young people surveyed said they would like to return to their rural hometowns to live and work if opportunities were available. The survey also showed that 91 percent of parents would support their son's or daughter's decision to become an entrepreneur and considered entrepreneurship to be a laudable career choice.

"My instinct tells me that's new," said Vigna, adding that in the past she thinks parents were more likely telling their children to get out and find a real job. "We keep saying that the stars are aligned for entrepreneurship."

The EntrepreneurShip Investigation curriculum, known as ESI, was developed by the 4-H program and extension specialists in the UNL College of Education



and Human Sciences. It was published in May 2008 after a year of extensive testing in schools, camps, 4-H clubs, and community-based groups.

The curriculum works well with both middle school and high school students. It has resulted in real businesses for these youths. At least in one situation, a father was assigned to carry on the business while the young entrepreneurs went off to college.

It is beneficial to introduce entrepreneurship at a young age. Studies show that 25 percent of kindergarteners possess the characteristics aligned with being an entrepreneur, but only 3 percent of high school seniors possess those same characteristics, possibly because of restraints and negative reinforcement encountered along the way. Among those character traits that define entrepreneurs are creativity and risk taking.

The ESI curriculum consists of three parts. Units 1 and 2 focus on basic skills needed to succeed in the professional and business world and look at examining a student's talents and interests, discovering entrepreneurs in the student's own family, exploring possible careers, and dressing and acting like a professional. Unit 3 focuses on building a business plan from concept developing through marketing and finance. The youths also learn about customer service, advertising, and simple financial statements.

The experiential curriculum is an outgrowth of earlier concepts developed

by Carol Thayer, former acting chair of the Department of Textiles, Clothing and Design, and Patricia Fairchild, 4-H curriculum design and youth entrepreneur specialist at UNL. Fairchild and Vigna are project leaders for ESI. Community Connections, a guide to help communities work with young people involved in ESI, is now being developed.

Financial support for the project was provided by the Nebraska Farm Bureau, Hometown Competitiveness, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, and the Krieger Family Foundation. The office of former Congressman Tom Osborne, the Nebraska Department of Education, and NET Force also were involved.

The curriculum is being used in 23 states as well as Canada and Albania.

More information can be found at <http://4h.unl/esi>.

UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska
Lincoln & HUMAN SCIENCES
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
233 Mabel Lee Hall
P.O. Box 880234
Lincoln, NE, 68588-0234

Non Profit
US Postage
PAID
UNL



CEHS Facts
Fall 2008 Enrollment
Undergraduates = 2,727
Graduates = 1,037