

Bizcamp grooms future entrepreneurs

by Deborah M. Todd
Courier Staff Writer

As the school year approaches and young people decide what to do with the last days of their summer vacation, at least 12 used their time earlier this month to decide what to do with the rest of their lives.

The National Foundation For Teaching Entrepreneurship wrapped up its week-long 2007 Biz Camp at the Pittsburgh Technology Council Aug. 10. The camp brought students to the council to learn the basics of entrepreneurship in an effort to create business plans and present them to local business owners.

"It's a lot of information to learn in one week because there were things like field trips and guest speakers," said

Sharieda Patterson of Vision Outreach Ministries Inc., who partnered with NFTE and the Pittsburgh Technology Council for the event. "On top of that, they had to learn each screen (of content) and how to

actually go through the process of thinking through a business idea."

In spite of high expectations and little time to meet them, the young entrepreneurs presented their business plans for judging, complete with PowerPoint slides, notes on projected costs and profits, comparisons to local competitors, marketing plans, sales projections and estimates of the capital necessary to start their businesses.

With the stakes of the competition being start-up funds to help make business ideas reality, the five teams of students delivered presentations to Craig Bingham of DCI Logistics, Larry Miller of Innovation Works and Doris Carson Williams of the African American Chamber of Commerce.

The teams used a variety of techniques to make their businesses stand apart from the rest. The entrepreneurs behind Pittsburgh Poppin' Popcorn, Chenelle Bailey, Tyra Patterson and Ketruah Vactor, handed out samples of pop-

corn to judges while William Carpenter, Terrell Jackson and Meshak Mazie touted previous experience for their video production company, Focus Visionaries.

But in the end, Leila Earl and Olivia Lawson's presentation for their sticker business, Blazin' Bumpers, won the first place prize and received \$150 to start their business.

"We got (the idea) from our own ideas of what we want to actually be in real life," said Lawson. "I want to be an artist and Leila wants to be a designer, so we said you can paint and design bumper stickers, so that's what we'll do."

"The concept of entrepreneurship is phenomenal because we have to face the reality that a lot of our kids will not go to college, so learning how to do something you have a passion for and creating a venue is going to be key," said Patterson.

Jerry Cozewith, CEO of NFTE says the passion displayed is representative of many who go through the

NFTE Bizcamp and he hopes that enthusiasm will allow him to bring NFTE classes to more schools.

"This is about raising aspirations, firing them up and saying you know what, just because nobody in my family has ever owned something doesn't mean I can't. And for kids, particularly kids of color in low-income communities, showing them the door to ownership is one of the most important things we can do for them in this new millennium so they can believe in possibilities for themselves," said Cozewith.

Meanwhile, Patterson says she plans to take the camp one step further by developing some of the plans introduced into actual businesses that will be owned and operated by student entrepreneurs.

"My goal is to take maybe two of these ideas and over the course of the next month begin really pour into it and build it so that next summer some of these kids can actually work in one of the businesses," said Patterson.



GRADUATION DAY—Students and instructors celebrate the end of NFTE 2007 BizCamp with judges Craig Bingham, back row; Larry Miller, back row; and Doris Carson Williams, front row, far right.