

# Business Sense: Igniting the spark of youth entrepreneurship

Susan Seaman/For the Times-Standard

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I recently attended "From the Fire in the Belly," an event where local entrepreneurs shared stories about the inspiration for, and exasperation from, owning a business.

As I listened, I learned that many of the successful entrepreneurs in our community didn't plan to grow up to own a business. Still, I started to believe that they had an ember in their belly long before the fire took hold. Today's successful business owners were yesterday's young entrepreneurs, and they didn't even realize it.

As a girl, Julie Fulkerson, creator of Plaza Design, sold cards and seeds door-to-door. These activities were literally the "seed" for her future as an entrepreneur. Peter Jermyn, a founding owner of Los Bagels and Emerald City Laundry, raised pigs and trapped muskrats as a way to make money as a young man. Today's business owners, account managers and business executives used to babysit, pet sit, mow lawns and sell lemonade.

A collaborative effort is happening in Humboldt to nurture these embers. Arcata Economic Development Corporation has partnered with Economic Fuel, the North Coast Small Business Development Center, the Headwaters Fund and the Humboldt County Office of Education (HCOE) to promote youth entrepreneurship by bringing Junior Achievement to Humboldt County. Junior Achievement is an international educational program that focuses on work readiness, entrepreneurship and financial literacy. Over the past year, middle school students in McKinleyville, Fortuna, Bayside and Eureka have participated in the program.

Working with middle school students, our goal is to help them recognize the characteristics they share with successful entrepreneurs and have them consider a business focus when they enter high school.

Once in high school, the Humboldt Regional Occupational Program offers several classes to help students to begin sharpening their business acumen. Those classes are enhanced with clubs like DECA (Delta Epsilon Chi), an international association of students studying business. High School students in Humboldt County are eligible to compete in the Young Entrepreneurs Business Challenge for a chance to win \$5,000 to start a business through HCOE's Rising Stars Foundation. At the college level, CR and HSU students can compete in Economic Fuel for a chance to win \$25,000 to start or expand their businesses. These resources provide budding entrepreneurs with the education and resources to begin shaping a future that allows them to make their own way in Humboldt County.

What does a young entrepreneur look like?

She may look like Jess McGuinty, owner of Jessicurl, who ran lemonade stands. McGuinty wasn't satisfied to just wait around for the next customer when things got slow. She dragged her ice-chest door to door to make the sale.

It was as a babysitter that McGuinty said she started recognizing important business lessons. At age 12, she made a stamp for business cards that said "Jessica McGuinty Babysitting," with her phone number and age. Her first lesson was not to date marketing material. When she turned 13, her stamp was no longer accurate.

He may look like Darus Trutna, the \$25,000 winner of Economic Fuel 2009, who ran lemonade stands with a friend. Their financial goal was to make enough money to buy candy and snacks for the day. Their specialty was pink lemonade, because everybody else sold yellow.

What do the entrepreneurs of tomorrow look like?

Ten-year-old Paloma Pearl Herrera-Thomas became a social entrepreneur at age 7 when she opened her lemonade stand to raise money for the Humboldt Wildlife Care Center. Herrera-Thomas made \$99.50 on her first day and raised \$250 overall for the organization that year. She continues to run the stand raising money for Relay for Life, the Sequoia Humane Society and St. Jude's Hospitals.

Herrera-Thomas said she learned to count money with the funds she earned at the lemonade stand. She also learned some important business lessons. Balloons and colorful signs help get attention. Free cookies help make sales. Being friendly is important, even if you're grumpy and you've had a bad day. She also said the lemonade stand is more fun when you work with a friend.

Tomorrow's entrepreneur may look like Jasmine Phiengsai, a junior from Eureka High School. She participated in Junior Achievement in middle school in South Dakota and wanted to share that experience with students in Eureka. A DECA member, she developed a project around the Junior Achievement middle school program, and won first place for her presentation at the California Career Development Conference. She will be presenting her project at the national conference in Kentucky this spring. She could be the future owner of a business, or she could be helping to mold the future business owners in our community.

Or, tomorrow's entrepreneur may be the barefoot boy on the corner with a TV tray and a pitcher of Kool-Aid on a hot day. An investment of 25 cents from you might just be what it takes to kindle the glow of the ember in his belly.

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