

National award shines light on young entrepreneur

Floris Fortier, 18, of Orange, to her surprise, has \$1,000 put away in the bank.

Fortier, and a friend won \$2,000 in a national entrepreneur competition, awarded for their plan for "Cross Road Cafe."

Last spring, they joined the Young Entrepreneur Society's (YES) pilot Coop-BizTeam program in Orange. The 140 hours of activities were spread from March 8 to June 21.

When I talked to Fortier, she said 12 teen-agers began, but she and only one other stayed with the course to the end.

Her friend's parents do not want his name publicized. He is a student at Franklin County Technical School.

I asked her how she felt about receiving the award.

"It's hard to believe, being successful at something. I'm amazed at myself, that it is possible that just two kids can make a difference," she said. "We accomplished something most people don't think teens can do." Tim Cohen-Mitchell of Greenfield, who has worked with Fortier at YES, has supplied me with her reaction.

She continued "When I was in YES in the summer of 1999, we came up with the idea of a cafe. I'm interested in cooking, so I liked the idea. We went on field trips to check at other businesses to see if they could help us get started, such as a co-op," Fortier told Cohen-Mitchell.

In fact, last spring not only did they go to restaurants in Greenfield, Northampton and Amherst, but went

all the way to New York City in May to visit the world's largest cyber cafes near Times Square and 5-Spot Soul Food Restaurant.

Fortier and her partner planned to put the Cross Road Cafe on South Main Street in Orange. She said the plan they submitted to the National 4-H Council, which sponsored the competition, was "20-plus pages" long. The pair has an idea for a safe, nonalcoholic meeting place where teens and adults can gather for beverages, light fare, entertainment and socializing. Twenty Pioneer Valley business owners assisted the BizTeam developing their plan.

Fortier said she and her partner divided the award. A 2002 graduate of Mahar Regional School, she has two jobs, in a nursing home and a restaurant. She is interested in working with elders.

"I expected it to be harder educationally and I wondered if I could understand and cope with the learning. Since I have learning difficulties, what worked for me was having a smaller group and getting more one-on-one help," Fortier told Cohen-Mitchell.

She also said she put her \$1,000 in a safe-deposit box so she wouldn't be "tempted to spend it on stupid things. There is a local business for sale that I am also interested in."

"This award makes me feel that my employers are taking me seriously. Having graduated from YES and having won this award, shows I have more than just a high school education," Fortier told Cohen-Mitchell.

In the future, she would really like to cook, as well as manage, if the cafe ever became a reality.

Congratulations are certainly due

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that young team.