

Youths minding their own businesses

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By DAVID A. VALLETTE

ORANGE — With another 12 to graduates July 15, the Young Entrepreneur Society will have handed diplomas to 40 young people and sent them on their way into the business world.

The society, which recently incorporated as a nonprofit organization serving low-income and at-risk teen-agers and young adults, has already spawned several businesses, including GI Computer Services, T&J's Custodial Service and Good Vibes.

In the planning is a "mini-mall" incubator of new businesses started by graduates, and a worker-owned Internet Cafe to give graduates both employment and management experience.

Tim Cohen-Mitchell, executive director and co-founder, said the society is an outgrowth from a one-time forum sponsored in 1996, at which teens identified employment as their top priority.

In response, the Orange Revitalization Partnership stepped in as a sponsor for entrepreneurial efforts by the young people, with Cohen-Mitchell, certified by Babson College to teach entrepreneurship, starting evening classes at the end of 1998.

GI Computer is owned by Greg Gamache and Andrew LaRoche, both 16 and students at Athol High School, and provides computer instruction, analysis, repairs and upgrades.

T&J's is owned by Jason LeClaire, 17, a student at Mahar Regional High School, who has pulled his whole family into the operation, including his parents and younger sister.

And Good Vibes was opened by Michelle Buja, selling incense, oils, tie-dye shirts, tapestries, jewelry and body piercing at the former Gypsy Boutique storefront on East Main Street. Her brother Jesse, 16, also a graduate, supplies some of the items sold by the business.

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