



BUSINESS CENTER — “Biz Center,” an office service and supply center operated by graduates of YES (Youth Entrepreneurial Society), opened at their facility at 26 South Main St., Orange, this week. Team members who initiated the business plan under the direction of Tim Cohen-Mitchell, co-founder and executive director of the local YES program, include, left to right — Katie O’Ferrell of Athol; Cohen-Mitchell; Jeroth Clark, 16, of Athol; Dan Richards, 25, of Orange; and Amber Ortiz of Greenfield.

Photo by Doubleday

By PAT DOUBLEDAY
ORANGE — If you run a small business in the North Quabbin area and are accustomed to traveling to the Amherst or Fitchburg area for office supplies and services, there is now another alternative. YES (Youth Entrepreneurial Society) has opened a service operation, Biz Center, at their facility at 26 South Main St.

The service is the result of a seven-member team, ranging in age from 16 to 25, who took the YES Biz Venture course, and planned and implemented the business center.

Tim Cohen-Mitchell, co-founder and executive director of the local YES programs, said that people working out of their homes is growing. To back this up, he said FedEx bought Kinko’s, the largest copy center in the country; UPS joined Mailboxes, Etc., and Staples have moved their copier from the back of their stores to the front because the margin of business services is greater than supplies. Staples has also added UPS to their services.

“These three shifts in industry is in line with what’s happening locally,” he said.

The Biz Center offers drop off and delivery for FedEx and UPS, they have high speed Internet access, laminating, high speed copiers, supplies ranging from paper clips to CD ROMs, and if the Center doesn’t have what your business needs, they have a catalog and can fax an order with next day delivery.

In addition to local small businesses, the Center can accommodate those who have business in the area, such as lawyers, social service workers, sales representatives. These people, Cohen-Mitchell said, work out of their cars.

“We see them all day,” he said, explaining that these individuals use the pay phone across the street from the YES

building, or they go to the Orange House of Pizza asking to use their phone. Although they probably have laptops with them, this area does not have wireless Internet available for their computers.

“We have everything you need that your car doesn’t have,” he said of the Center.

Another service the Center offers that is not available in this area is a conference room. This separate room is adjacent to the main Center operations and has a good size conference table. The room is dedicated to Philip Benoit who went through the YES program and kept in touch with the organization. He wanted to open a music business and cafe, and the business plan, initiated by Benoit and two other teens won the national 4-H business competition. Benoit was killed in an accident last April, a week before his 21st birthday. Cohen-Mitchell said his parents knew how much he liked the YES organization, and they set up an endowment for him.

“We got donations from all over the

country,” he said. Most of the \$3,500 received was used to renovate the conference room.

Although the Center officially opened Monday, Cohen-Mitchell said they had \$4,500 in sales over the past six weeks without the Center being open.

The team that initiated the Biz Center and who will staff it are Jeroth Clark, 16, of Athol, (2001 graduate); Amber Ortiz, 24, of Greenfield (2004); Dan Richards, 25, of Orange (1999); Samantha Charter, 14, of Phillipston (2004); Blaise Barstow, 16, of Orange (2002); and David Malave, 17, of Erving (2004). Katie O’Ferrell, 22, of Athol (2004) is also a member of the team but will be leaving.

YES has been in operation in the North Quabbin area since 1998 and has graduated more than 240 youths. YES owns the building at 26 South Main St. and is an independent organization, Cohen-Mitchell said.

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Ortiz said one student bought an item for 80 cents each and sold them for \$5 each at a function that took place in Greenfield. The item was something not available in this area, and she said students have to ask themselves who is going to want the item, what will they pay for it, and is the profit margin worth it.

Cohen-Mitchell said the youths are introduced to as many entrepreneurs as possible so that they will have a better idea of what is involved in running a business. Business owners speak at YES programs and the young people visit their businesses.

Not every YES graduate decides to be an entrepreneur, and the program can help the teen make this all-important decision. He said the student needs to find out what they are passionate about, and what they would love to do and get paid for it. As an example, he said a YES student might desire to be a film producer. This may not be feasible but they could work in a related job.

“If you use your initiative, use your brain and take risks, you can find something that fits who you are,” he said.

He said that through the national YES program, he traveled to Alaska where a program was held and before the program started, a survey was taken. The result was that 10 percent of the group wanted to work for someone else, 40 percent wanted to be they own boss, and 50 percent were undecided. A survey taken at the end of the program showed that zero were undecided, 75 percent wanted to work for someone

else and 25 percent wanted to be their own boss.

If a person works for someone else — and 93 percent of the population do just that — and they take the YES program, they are going to understand how things are put together and how they work, Cohen-Mitchell said.

“You’ll be more valuable to the business; you notice things that could be very useful.”

While Biz Venture is a course for both boys and girls (and those who complete the course can earn three college credits), there is a course just for teenage girls: Girl Venture. Cohen-Mitchell said it has been found that girls tend to excel in learning in a single-sex environment. They feel more comfortable taking risks, they are not distracted, and they have a voice they might not have if boys were in the group. In addition, he said a survey found that girls were not well represented in going into business or thinking of business as a career. He said this could be because of a lack of role models, and there are women guest speakers at the Girl Venture program.

“Women create more businesses now than men,” he said, adding that part of the reason is the glass ceiling. He said women are adept at multi-tasking and managing since this is what they do in the home. He said women have been kept in a gender box and they have had to find niches in order to become empowered. He said women are better credit risks than men, which he attributes to women handling the finances in the home.