

Summer campers learn the ropes of business

By VIRGINIA RAY
Recorder Staff

BUCKLAND — While some students have spent the last two weeks at camps studying nature, theater, and crafts, about a dozen local students have been concentrating on gross profit, start-up costs and business plans at the Hilltown West County BizCamp.

"I want to sell watches, and then move on to other stuff," said 13-year-old Philip Nolan of Buckland, who has called his fledgling company, "Silver Tuna," after the line delivered by the robbers in the movie, "Home Alone."

"I chose this because when we went to the New York wholesale stores, there were like 50 stores with watches," Nolan said. "And there are no other watch stores really in this area and I feel local young people need a place they can go to buy timepieces."

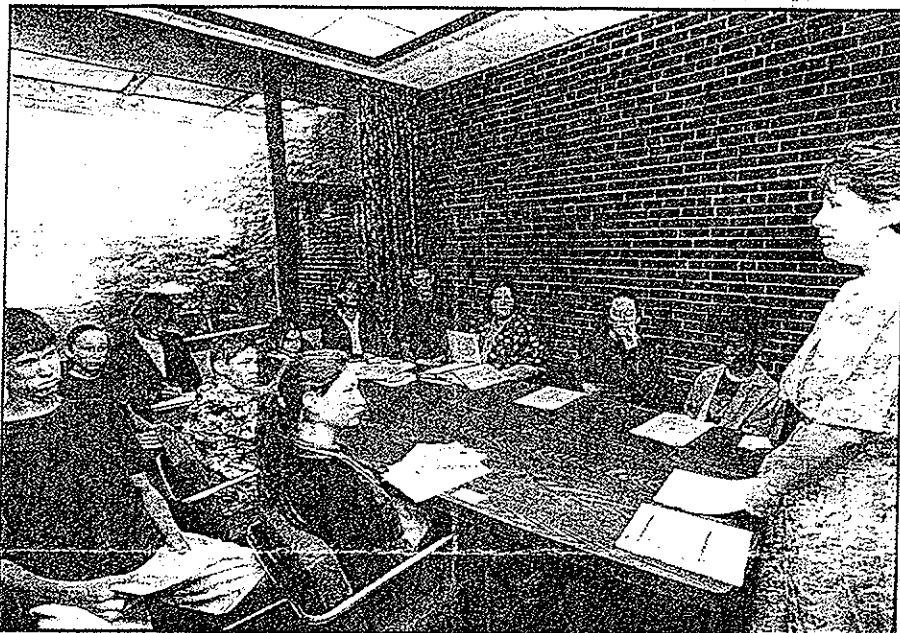
Nolan was referring to the camp's overnight visit to New York City, when students visited the New York Stock Exchange, Wall Street and the wholesale district to "buy" products and meet with successful young entrepreneurs.

The unique, tuition-free camp is a collaborative project of the Hilltown Community Development Corp. and the Young Entrepreneurs Society Inc., and is also sponsored by the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts.

Meeting at the Mohawk Trail Regional High School, the group has put in 100 hours learning how to plan and start a business from guest speakers, interactive workshops, field trips to numerous area businesses, as well as to UMass in Amherst and New York City, and a business plan competition.

The curriculum, developed by the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship, has been used to train more than 30,000 young people in the fundamentals of business ownership. Tim Cohen-Mitchell is the founder and executive director of YES, which started in Orange, and the lead teacher with Margaret Pringle of the Hilltown CDC.

"Our overall aim is to enable young people in our region to develop critical economic and life skills through entrepreneurial and employment readiness training," said



Karen Laudon of the Greenfield Savings Bank in Shelburne Falls speaks to kids participating in the Hilltown West County BizCamp about business loans and responsible money management.

Cohen-Mitchell. "And this has been a great group."

Friday morning they were putting the final touches on their business plans before presenting them to parents and friends and receiving their diplomas.

"I love technology," said Matthew Drawe, 17, of Cummington, with a grin as he pulled a graph from the copier. "It helps me follow my stocks. I have a great interest in the stock market."

Drawe's plan is to start a bottled water business called "Melted Ice."

He said he especially enjoyed visiting merchants, bankers and town officials in the village of Shelburne Falls this week and learning how the community works.

"I really liked learning how the community volunteers so much to make it a business district," said Drawe, who has signed up for an entrepreneur business course at his

school in September. "And in this course we got so much great stuff to read, for free."

Crystal Wilcox, 13, of Chesterfield is planning "Menagerie B&B," a

unique business where guests may not only bring overnight the animal of their choice, but board, breed and sell them.

She thinks one of the most impor-

tant principles the students learned are "keeping good records, and how to make a good resume."

"The buy low, sell high thing," added Nolan. "That was important."

And she enjoyed learning about taxes from Greenfield Savings Bank's accountant Jonathan George.

"At first it was complicated, but I figured it out," she said.

At the bank they also met with Branch Manager Karen Laudon, who counseled them on sound personal financial practices and responsibilities such as balancing a checkbook, establishing good credit and being wary of credit card companies that target recent high school graduates.

"And students get three or four cards and they use them," she said. "You've got to have that self-control. It's easy to go to a store and charge it, but when that bill comes in, it's overwhelming."

Emily MacDuiff, 21, of Greenfield, plans to try to make a go of her company, "Fabulously Frugal Baby Supplies," an at-home shopping alternative for low-income status single parents such as she is about to become.

"This is something I would like to do, to be my own boss and be available for my son and be an at-home mom," MacDuiff said. "But whether I chose to start a business or not, I still learned a lot."

For more information on the Hilltown West County Bizcamp call (413) 296-4536, Ext. 12 or email margep@hilltowncdc.org.

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