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Otis teenager shares top award at BizCamp

OTIS— On Friday, July 20, at the Mohawk Trail Regional School in Buckland, 11 teenagers from hilltown and area communities graduated from an intensive two-week BizCamp. This is a day program that helps young people learn how to start and operate their own business and develop employment skills. BizCamp uses the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship's (NFTE) curriculum which, since 1988, has

helped more than 30,000 young people worldwide.

Each young entrepreneur, using Power Point, had 10 minutes to present their business plans to, and receive comments from, a panel of judges. These included Marie Burkart, executive director of Hilltown CDC; Valerie Contie, assistant director of Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network; Roger Howard of

Howard & Associates; and Amy Shapiro from Franklin County CDC.

The judges found it difficult to choose winners among a group who all had strengths in a variety of areas. Joanna Grabowski from Otis and Jamyal Newton from Pittsfield tied for first place, and Crystal Wilcox from Chesterfield and Dylan Kelleher from Cummington tied for second in the Business Plan Competition.

'Booksburgh'

According to co-winner Joanna Grabowski, the process of preparing a business plan included doing market research of the area and the industry to determine the feasibility or demand for such a business, as well as projected costs and sales.

Grabowski's company was a new-and-used book store named Booksburgh, and is something in which she is really interested. It would probably be in Lee rather than Otis, because of its larger market, but will be a while in coming, as she's only 15 years old.

Grabowski will turn 16 in October, when she'll be a sophomore at Gateway Regional High School in Huntington. She attends Gateway through School Choice, and plays flute in the school band. Her hobbies, not so coincidentally, are reading and writing, "especially fiction." She expects to attend college but has no favorite chosen yet.

The daughter of John and Rose Grabowski, Joanna has an older sister, Jessica, who graduated from Gateway Regional in June 2001. It was their mother who learned about the free BizCamp program and suggested Joanna attend.

"I'm glad I did. It was a very good program, and I highly recommend it

to other teens," Joanna said.

Her prize was a cash box, which will prove handy when she becomes a real entrepreneur. In the meantime, she's going to look for a part-time job for some hands-on experience and savings for the future, another good plan.

Other businesses

First place co-winner Jamyal Newton of Pittsfield presented a plan for Triad, selling electronics. Tied for second place were Crystal Wilcox of Chesterfield with Menagerie B&B, a bed and breakfast that welcomes animals, and Dylan Keller of Cummington with Berkshire Typing service.

State Representative Steve Kulik awarded the diplomas and spoke to the graduates and their family and friends. He was impressed with their dedication in devoting two weeks of excellent summer weather to improving their entrepreneurial skills.

The other BizCamp graduates were Nicholas Vogt and Evan Sabourin of Plainfield, Matthew Drawe and Gregory Tessier of Cummington, Philip Nolan of Buckland, Emily MacDuff of Greenfield, and Yanara Barriga of West Hatfield.

The Hilltown/West County BizCamp received funding from Hilltown CDC, the Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network, the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, and the Community Coalition for Teens out of Franklin County.

To register for BizVentures, which runs July 30-Aug. 10 at Greenfield Community College, and to learn more about this program, contact Marie Burge at 774-5005 or casamaria2@aol.com.