

# Orange BizCenter's Café & Copy Shop To Create Jobs For Youth

The Young Entrepreneurs Society (YES) recently purchased the former DePratti's Cafe at 24-28 South Main Street in Orange – with the goal of creating jobs and training opportunities for local youth – to house a café, performing arts business, a copy shop and YES offices. This venture marking a major expansion of YES' mission, will create opportunities for youth, be a more visible and integral presence for the non-profit organization in downtown Orange, and potentially provide a much-needed boost to the downtown retail climate.

The building that will house the BizCenter – which will operate as a non-profit subsidiary of YES, with surplus revenue redistributed to cover training costs, donations to community groups and building renovations – was purchased for \$74,900, with a Community Reinvestment Act loan from Banknorth, a grant from the K. L. Bruce Charitable Fund, and contributions from businesses, organizations and individuals.

The café is expected to open in April or May; the copy shop in September; and YES expects this month to relocate its own offices into the building from the corner storefront it has been leasing at 1 South Main Street.

YES began as a project of the Orange Revitalization Partnership (ORP) in 1998, and has since helped over 200 area young people aged 11-21 start businesses and launch careers, through its Odd Jobs Exchange, entrepreneurship classes and job readiness programs. Last spring, YES piloted its 140-hour "Co-op BizTeam," a program where participants developed a business plan for a cooperatively run café, with the help of 20 Pioneer Valley business owners who served as guest speakers, business tour hosts and mentors. The resulting 23-page Plan went on to win the National 4-H Council's Cooperative Business Plan Competition last summer.

Playing a central role in developing the BizCenter project is eighteen year old BizTeam member and 2002 Mahar graduate, Floris Fortier. She pointed out that the Café, which will offer an affordable breakfast and lunch menu and occasional evening entertainment, will be co-operated by young people. "The BizCenter is not a teen center. It's a place of business and will be open to everyone who enjoys good food and coffee and an upbeat atmosphere," she added.

Each BizTeam is comprised of an experienced adult manager and several youth co-operators. YES Executive Director Tim Cohen-Mitchell said, "The BizTeams will be responsible for all business activities of their unit." He continued, "Training will take place both onsite and at area businesses." The young worker-managers will job shadow and intern at cooperating local businesses whose owners and managers will serve as mentors.

Students will have an opportunity to rotate among different jobs at both businesses, according to Cohen-Mitchell. "Our goal is to help our alumni discover what type of work they like best and provide the training, support and experience they'll need to successfully transition into employment in the wider community," he explained.

Habitech, an Orange-based contractor and Brian Whaland, a YES alumni and officer of the YES board of directors, will be overseeing renovations to the two-story building.

To cover Café start-up costs, YES is selling "BizCenter Bonds" – sold in denominations of \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100, at 10 percent under face value. Bondholders agree to hold the bonds for six months. After that time, they can be redeemed for face value for purchases at the Café. Purchase bonds by mail or in person at 1 South Main Street in Orange.

YES is seeking volunteers from the community to help with renovations and to serve as advisors on its BizCenter Council. For more information, contact Jeff Aho at YES, (866) YES-4-BIZ (toll free); or email [jeff@yes-inc.org](mailto:jeff@yes-inc.org); or visit [www.yes-inc.org](http://www.yes-inc.org).