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Downingtown East Students Strategize Business

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By **CONNOR SHOWALTER**, Staff Writer

UWCHLAN — About 100 business and art students at Downingtown East High School worked on a multifaceted business project, 'Get Real,' during the school year and for its second year, the project gained the support of the Exton Region Chamber of Commerce.

The student-run business, East Co., is directed by business education high school teachers Diana Millerick of marketing and Web page design, Heather Mailliard of entrepreneurship, and Terri-Lee Cook of the art department.

This year, students from Downingtown West joined the project.

Chamber First Vice-Chair Matt Matosky, who is president and chief executive of Lionfield Technology Solutions Ltd., acted as a liaison on the project. Funding for the program was provided by the chamber.

Planning for the 'Get Real' program started about two years ago when Chamber President Robert Johnston envisioned a project that incorporated "hands-on" business experience in the classroom.

"Students learn the pressures and reality of what it's like to run a business," Johnston said. "What's interesting is that they make a lot of mistakes along the way, which is terrific. We would rather have them make mistakes now, so they can learn from them before they invest money into businesses of their own."

Last year the students operated their own business by selling greeting cards and ceramic cougars (the school mascot) for the senior class of 2009. For this year's campaign, the students decided to reach a larger market and went with a green initiative as their campaign focus.

At the beginning of the year, the entrepreneurship class coordinated with the art department that East Co. would sell organic cotton T-shirts that would display environmental themes.

Junior Scott Jackman, who was assistant vice president of finance for the project, said that students in business classes developed a mission statement and a strategic plan in order to devise a way to sell the eco-friendly shirts for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

East Co. made two presentations to the chamber to keep it informed on their plans and progress during the project. The presentations were led by senior Ron Chesnick, the project's chief executive. The chamber board of directors in return provided professional instruction to the students.

Nancy Tuttle, president of Tuttle Marketing Services, helped the students promote their T-shirts to the public.

Tuttle said both schools had to make sure communication between student groups and the chamber was "on the same page and progressing on the same timeline."



More than 100 students from Downingtown East and Downingtown West have participated in the 'Get Real' program, where they create their own business.



Students from Downingtown East and Downingtown West high schools learned the pressures and realities that come along with running a business as they participated in the 'Get Real' program.

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Downingtown East Students Strategize Business (continued)

Junior Sarah Weber, the project's director of public relations, helped organize several other publicity stunts including meeting with former Philadelphia Flyer Bob Kelly, who was part of the ice hockey team's 1974 and 1975 Stanley Cup Championships and Downingtown Mayor Josh Maxwell, in addition the students were given airtime on a local radio station.

"I learned more about what it takes to run a business," said acting CEO Eric Figlivolo, a junior, who also learned that smaller groups need to work together in order to function.

Social media was another aspect of the project to further spread awareness for East Co. Junior Sam Savino was responsible for updating the corporation's Facebook page, as part of the marketing strategy.

"The project got kids, who weren't that involved in school, interested," Savino said. "I learned a lot more about social media I didn't know before."

Other students involved developed a Web site, www.isee-green.com, with the assistance of Lionfield Technolog's Web development director Mark Poteet. Junior Shawn Moffitt, also in the student media department, promoted the business on the school's morning announcement T.V. program.

"Pictures of the mascot around the school caused questions for the project and spread awareness about it," Moffitt said.

The Green mascot was designed by senior Sébastien Boulange and became their symbol for their corporation.

"I was floored by the feedback from the students about the project," said Mailliard. "It is a very valuable experience."

Currently, East Co. has raised about \$1,100, almost doubling the amount generated from last year's campaign. According to the Downingtown East teachers, the students were able to stay motivated and dedicated time for the project inside and outside of the classroom.

"The project gives them a real life experience," said Millerick. "It is very encouraging for students to see real life situations, opposed to lessons out of a textbook."

The project, which expanded to Downingtown West High School this year, could include another school district in the coming year, the chamber's Johnson said.

"Everyone at the chamber is very excited to see this program flourish," Matosky said. "We're getting some really good response."

The East Co. shirts, which are original works of art by students at Downingtown East are still currently available at the school or at the business' online store at www.isee-green.com and cost \$15 or 20. The East Co. Facebook page can be found by searching "ECO-East-Company."