

Business Incubator Program Breeds Student Entrepreneurs

By Tracy Williams
News Staff Writer

Most high school students don't know the first thing about starting their own business. But this summer, some local teen-agers are producing real life results as entrepreneurs while participating in a business incubator program.

It has been through Palos Verdes on the Net, a non-profit computer technology center located in Rancho Palos Verdes, that more than 50 students-- some from Peninsula schools and others coming from as far away as San Bernardino and San Diego-- have volunteered their time as interns to create a data base business from scratch.

"I thought this was a good experience in learning to start a business and how it works," said Elyse Lluncor, a junior at Peninsula High. "It really opened my eyes because I didn't know what you had to do in order to start a business."

"The trick is giving students the opportunity to explore their dream of being self-employed," said Ted Vegvari, owner of PV on the Net. "The business incubator gives them a wide variety of (opportunities) with the chance of succeeding without putting finances at stake."

The Role of Computers in Business

Vegvari, the creator of the program, said the students' business is essentially an advertising service with the ultimate goal of giving new businesses the opportunity to market to other businesses within the data base.

He said that he chose to start with a database business because it could be achieved during the time frame of the summer program, June 23 through Aug. 29. "The program allows interns to create, market, deliver and service products," he said, "while giving them the chance to see how clients perceive the quality of the product."

Vegvari also said that the program teaches interns about computers and the role they play in running a business. "A data base consists of research, mail merge, desktop



publishing, and telephone and in-person sales," said Vegvari. "It's all; done on the computer with computer software"

According to Vegvari, the first thing the interns did to start their business was to obtain the information needed for their product.

"The interns called 15 city halls, chambers of commerce, fire departments and libraries," said Vegvari. "They had to call at least 100 organizations to put into one Business Survival Kit."

Next, they compiled the information and created the data base which, Vegvari said, taught them about teamwork.

Lluncor said, "We had to find phone numbers, while someone else would type the numbers into the computer," she said. "Working together is really important."

"They now realize that they can't do it all themselves." Vegvari said. "It takes a lot of thought and planning to make a venture work."

A Survival Kit for Businesses

At this point, the interns have completed their product, The New Business Survival

Kit, a packet that contains information for new businesses starting up in the South Bay.

The packet includes information about the South Bay community, such as the numbers and addresses of city halls, chambers of commerce, libraries and other civic departments, according to Vegvari.

According to Andrew Lin, a senior at West Torrance High, the Business Survival Kit is intended to help recently established businesses "get on their feet."

"The New Business Survival Kit will be mailed for free," said Lin. "It's all the information a new business would need to know."

Lin also said that new businesses are more receptive to promotional information because they may not have found a reliable place to buy supplies or a nice dining place to which to take their clients.

Nathan Fong, a Peninsula High senior, said that it's not only for new businesses. "An existing business may want to expand, and this is an inexpensive way to research new clients," he added.

Attracting New Business

The next step, said Vegvari, is presenting the data base to real businesses. "We just finished contacting 200 businesses" he said, "and 12 of those businesses want to do a presentation."

Vegvari said interns will learn to close deals, deliver products, handle finances and follow up with clients before the end of the summer internship program.

To sign up, the new client provides PV on the Net with 100 copies of their promotional information and a payment of \$150. The fee will cover the cost of mailing out the promotional information over a three-month period.

"The program is allowing me to learn entrepreneurial and computer skills, and apply both concepts to one output," said Hoon Kim, who recently graduated from Peninsula High and will attend the University of

Pennsylvania this fall.

'A Taste of the Future'

The incubator does more than just teach the interns about entrepreneurship: It gives

them a taste of what the future—after college— may hold.

Peninsula High senior Christina Bumatay said she never thought of starting her own business until entering the program. Now it's definitely a possibility. "It has been really beneficial and I've learned a lot," she said.

Ryan Megowan, a Peninsula High sophomore, said the program has inspired him to consider pursuing his own business because "you can make a lot of money."

Bumatay said entrepreneurship appeals to her because of the flexible hours.

In conclusion, Fong said, "The incubator has helped us to learn about starting our own businesses, keeping the computer center dynamic and branching out with the community."

Any students interested in pursuing a fall internship with PV on the Net can visit its website

at:www.palosverdes.com/computercenter

Palos Verdes on the NET

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