

Area students prepare to get down to business

by Bruce A. Love

It's back to school time! That means it's back to business for a lot of enterprising students. In many schools across the region, business programs, clubs, and curriculum are being added to traditional courses in response to a growing awareness of the tremendous value of a business education. This is good news, since most of us enter into the business world in one way or another. Whether we choose to assume responsibilities on the family farm, pursue a career in manufacturing, start our own business, or enter other areas of professional employment, one thing is certain: we all are thrust into the business world and expected to contribute! The more our children learn about management, marketing, and other business activities, the better prepared they will be to meet the challenges of their selected careers.

Unlike other important subjects taught in schools, business principles are not typically part of the required curriculum. As a result, many of us have had to learn about budgeting, supervising, and other management activities on the job. This costs companies both time and money, and delays employees from advancing into higher-paying jobs. Fortunately, educators, like Marian Vergona and Kassondra Leidy (Central High School, Martinsburg), have developed curriculum and adopted programs designed to give their graduating students a decisive career advantage. One successful program used at Central is Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA).

FBLA is "a nonprofit educational association of students preparing for careers in business and business-related fields." Programs are offered at the middle school level through college, but I believe FBLA's greatest value is for high school students as they prepare for future educational or occupational pursuits (it looks good on college and employment applications). FBLA students work on projects individually and in groups. Students specialize in areas such as entrepreneurship, website development, public speaking, or other areas relating to business or office technology. In the spring, students compete regionally in their specialized area, and also have an opportunity to socialize with students in other schools who share similar interests. Winners compete in state and national competitions (often held at exclusive resort settings!) For more information, visit www.pafbla.org.

Junior Achievement (JA) is another business program offered in some area schools. JA involves volunteers, educators, parents, and contributors in programs designed for grades K-12. According to Donna Rudnick (Senior Director of District Operations), trained volunteers affiliated with JA are invited into schools to present fun and educational mini courses on age-appropriate business topics. With the aid of professionally developed materials from JA, volunteers teach even the youngest students about fundamental business concepts such as spending and saving wisely. In many instances, costs associated with JA in elementary schools are picked up by local sponsors or waived by Junior Achievement! Contact local District Manager, Jennifer Knepper, for more information 814-943-5246, or visit www.pittsburgh.ja.org.

At the college level, Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE) offers students an "opportunity to develop leadership, teamwork and communication skills through learning, practicing and teaching the principles of free enterprise." Each year, SIFE teams from all over the world, develop projects based upon criteria outlined by SIFE International. SIFE's approach to teaching business skills is to encourage students to use their knowledge to better their communities by developing outreach projects. In addition to reinforcing the business concepts learned in the classroom, students learn to approach business from a compassionate and ethical perspective. Area businesses can help themselves while helping a local SIFE team, by serving on an advisory board or asking SIFE to assist with some business-related project! Each spring, SIFE competitions are held worldwide, and draw together thousands of students and business leaders. In addition to having an opportunity to travel and receive recognition for "jobs well done," many students receive offers of employment! For more about SIFE, visit www.sife.org.

Students of all ages have a strong desire to make a difference in the world. SIFE, FBLA, and JA all teach valuable skills and provide opportunities for students to accomplish this objective. As parents, educators, and business professionals, we should all encourage our young people to take advantage of these terrific programs and also to have a lot of fun in the process. If we do, we will all benefit by their success!

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