

Entrepreneurship can be taught in the classroom

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By Brad Spirrison, Sun-Times Columnist

While new businesses are ultimately judged by how well markets respond to them, entrepreneurs can get schooled on what it takes to start a company. The best ones may even make a few bucks in the process.

This Wednesday, ten student entrepreneurs representing five high schools in Chicago will compete for \$25,000 in cash and prizes during the fifth annual Future Founders business plan competition. Managed by the Chicagoland Entrepreneurial Center (CEC), the Future Founders program teaches juniors and seniors from Gwendolyn Brooks Academy, Ace Technical Charter High School, Global Visions Academy, Chicago Vocational Career Academy, and the School of Entrepreneurship at the South Shore Campus how to develop and implement business plans.

During the nearly year-long program, dozens of volunteer entrepreneurs are brought in to teach students real-world skills that can't be conveyed via a PowerPoint presentation.

"We are developing relationships with students so they can see that there are better career options than just working for somebody else," said CEC managing director Scott Issen, who has run the program since its inception in 2005. "Regardless of what they go on to do, we are enabling students to develop a toolkit that they can use throughout their careers."

Among the young businesses competing for prizes donated by sponsors including Microsoft, Motorola and The Smart Bet Charity Poker Tournament are a pair of aspiring device manufacturers. One company is developing a lock that illuminates once a key gets close to its proximity. Another is working on a Bluetooth-enabled cell phone for the hearing-impaired.

To date, more than 500 students have participated in the program. This year's themes included social networking technology and environmental sustainability. Later this year, Future Founders will launch an alumni network to help graduates share their own stories. We can all benefit from their success.

"Entrepreneurship is the economic engine of our economy," Issen said. "It is through entrepreneurs that we will get out of the recession."

The business plan competition will be held at Chicago's ESPN Zone.

i.c stars eyes upturn

Chief information officers from Boeing, Pepsico and the Metropolitan Pier & Exposition Authority will be on hand this Friday for the Capitalize on Illinois 2010 forum hosted by i.c. stars. The program will focus on how local businesses can best take advantage of a global economic upturn.

For more than a decade, i.c. stars has taught young adults from the inner city computer development and design skills via intense 12-week training programs.

For information about Capitalize in Illinois 2010, which will be held at Maggiano's in River North, can be found at www.icstars.org.

SPSS chief wins ITA award

Former SPSS chairman Jack Noonan on April 29 was honored with the ITA CityLIGHTS award.

Noonan served as CEO of the predictive software company from 1992 until last year, after it was acquired by IBM for north of \$1 billion. A corporate member of the Illinois Technology Association for the last 18 years, Noonan said he plans to devote much of his time moving forward to building the local tech community.

Other CityLIGHTS Awards winners include Oakbrook Terrace-based DVD retailer Redbox and Chicago-based online restaurant delivery service GrubHub.com.