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### Catching spirit of enterprise

#### Baltimore summer program gives taste of business

By Hanah Cho

Sun reporter

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Forget working at the mall, life-guarding or filing paperwork. For 30 Baltimore students, their summer job is about finding their entrepreneurial spirit.

And many of them believe that getting paid to craft a business plan is not a bad way to spend a summer.

"I wish this was a real job," said Tamia Jones, 17, a rising senior at Northwestern High School.

Jones and other classmates are becoming budding entrepreneurs through a new component of the city's summer employment program, which secured jobs for more than 6,500 students this year. Students in the entrepreneurship program are learning the ins and outs of running a business, networking, leadership skills and financial literacy. Like their counterparts in other jobs, they work 30 hours a week for six weeks, earning \$6.55 an hour. The program ends Aug. 1.

After supporting the YouthWorks program for many years, Colgate-Palmolive selected Baltimore as one of two cities to participate in the company's youth entrepreneurship initiative. (Atlanta is the other.) Colgate and Stop, Shop and Save supermarket donated \$30,000 to establish the summer workshop at Morgan State University. Along with the 30 YouthWorks students, more than a dozen other students signed up for the program and are paying tuition.

"It's really nice," said Raquel Suber, 15, a rising sophomore at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, which is part of the YouthWorks program. "When I first came, I said I'm coming to school for the summer, ugh. But we learned how to be the boss and do our own thing."

Advocates of entrepreneurship education - which has been on the rise across college campuses in recent years - are reaching children as young as kindergarten to instill characteristics such as teamwork and problem-solving skills, said Bonnae Meshulam, president of Junior Achievement of Central Maryland.

Natasha Cross, founder of Baltimore-based Engaging Youth Entrepreneurs (EYE) for Change, which is running the camp-like program, says entrepreneurship is not just about business ownership. It's about creating a can-do attitude among youths that encourages critical thinking, creativity and innovation.



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"A lot of our young people have career aspirations to be criminal lawyers, doctors, and that's great," said Cross, 25, a Morgan State graduate. "Whatever young people want to do, we want to support them. We want to make sure they have an entrepreneurial attitude and mind-set. They know how to contribute to the bottom line of the company, they understand the inner workings of management when it comes to running a company, they know how to create new ideas and ways of doing things."

It's a message that's getting across to students.

Shawntay Whitney, 17, a rising senior at Vivien T. Thomas Medical Arts Academy, wants to open a restaurant and catering business to complement her love of cooking.

"They're teaching us things we don't learn in school," she says.

Another student, Quante Samuel, 16, wants to be a doctor with his own practice. Samuel, a rising junior at Polytechnic, says he likes the idea of being his own boss.

A large part of the six-week work program is a business plan contest. Teams of students are competing for a \$500 first-place prize and other honors. Students must propose a new business, explain how a product or service the company provides would work, identify competitors, describe how they would finance the venture and outline how it would earn money.

Some business ideas include a virtual dating game and Player's Choice 3000, a multi-platform gaming console.

Mark Brown, 18, who's attending the University of Baltimore in the fall, acknowledged a big hurdle in bringing the console to market: licensing agreements with the dominant players in the gaming industry, such as Sony and Microsoft.

The program also covers lessons in creating a personal budget, balancing a checkbook, multi-tasking and delivering a 30-second sales pitch. The students also get hands-on experience, such as writing a business letter and addressing envelopes, and they're meeting local business leaders.

The class also embarked on field trips, including to the Federal Reserve office in Baltimore and a recent outing to Arundel Golf Park in Glen Burnie. There, the students practiced their swings, while Cross emphasized the importance of networking.

The business plan competition has been serious work for these students, who must not only dream up big ideas but also conduct market research, devise advertising strategies and analyze competitors and customers.

A field trip to West Baltimore's Pennsylvania Avenue, once the hub of black culture and life, spawned a business idea for one team: a historic city tour.

"You go to the Inner Harbor but you don't see the deep history of the city," says Suber, who is working with Whitney and two other students on the project. "It gives you a different outlook of Baltimore."

To distinguish themselves from existing competitors, they decided to create an interactive tour that would include acting students who depict historic characters and provide riddles for guests. The team is still finalizing the various stops along the tour, but they're confident of their chances in the competition.

"Some people are doing products," Suber said. "We thought of something that's doable."

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