

# Entrepreneur program celebrates 10 years

## Mentor Match Teen Entrepreneur Program introduces teens to career fields in business

By ANN BLOOM

For EO Media Group

ENTERPRISE — The Mentor Match Teen Entrepreneur Program is 10 years old.

The important milestone was celebrated in May with a small ceremony at the Enterprise Community Congregational Church, honoring the participants of this year’s Mentor Match Teen Entrepreneur Program. There were six Wallowa County juniors and seniors who participated in the program.

Stacy Green, the program’s adviser, said the program is a way to encourage teens to think about entrepreneurship opportunities. It began at a time when many teens were leaving the county to pursue other opportunities in other parts of the state and not returning to Wallowa County with the skills they had acquired.

Green said she saw this happening in the early 2000s as many teens left to pursue careers and education. Green saw the program “as a way to get more teens interested in entrepreneurship and the skills business owners need to grow,” she said.

“We were losing the best and the brightest to other states and communities,” she said.

### Coming up with the program

Green conceived of the program to introduce teens to career fields in business such as accounting, sales and entrepreneurship.

The mentor program introduces teens to the

nuances of being an entrepreneur as they learn about marketing, pricing a product, time management, customer service and public relations.

According to a press release supplied by Green, Bayden Menton, an incoming senior at Joseph Charter School, earned the award for Top Producer for his business, Old School Cutting Boards, which earned more than \$6,000 in revenue. Menton produces cutting boards from scrap wood taken from the old gym floor of the school after a fire in January 2020.

The boards initially sold for \$75 each. However, after it was pointed out to Menton by fellow participants, Trace Evans and Zoey Leith, that what he was really selling were memories of the school, such as state sports championships or school dances, and looking at the cost comparison of class rings and lettermen’s jackets, it was decided to raise the price to \$250.

“There’s a lot of things that need to be taken into account when pricing your product, Menton said.

The program draws teens from the Joseph Charter School, Wallowa High School, Enterprise High School, alternative education students and homeschooled students. Green estimates that over the past decade, approximately nine to 10 students participate each year. Some are repeats, participating in their junior and senior years. The nine-month program begins in September, when teens are challenged with the task of coming up with the idea for a business and proceeding with starting their business.

“The long-term goal (of the program) is for our teens to come back with skills needed in our community,” Green said.

### Learning to fail

Outmigration, where

young people leave the community they grew up in for opportunities in education or work and do not return to their communities of origin, is a huge issue all across the country, Green said. Companies here are desperate for certain skills if they are to thrive and survive, she said.

Green speaks passionately about the student entrepreneurs she has mentored over the years — teen entrepreneurs such as Leith, who just graduated from Joseph Charter School and was given the award Most Likely to Be an Entrepreneur for the second year in a row. She was the first to launch her business, called EZ 123 Kitchen. Leith had a marketing plan and financial records showing how she earned revenue totaling more than \$1,300.

Incoming Enterprise senior Alona Yost, started an animal care business called Alona’s Perfect Pet Sitting, taking care of dogs, cats and other animals. When the business took off, she began including child care and was in high demand from busy parents who needed quality child care.

Starting and running one’s own business is not easy, and it comes with unseen and unexpected pitfalls. Leith, for example, had to learn how to manage the sometimes-conflicting pressures of schoolwork, outside work, social obligations, extracurricular activities and family responsibilities. She learned the importance of managing one’s times through lessons on goal-setting and prioritizing and was able to run her business and still find time for other things.

Katrina Haines, an Enterprise graduate who started KH Custom Designs, an art business making custom stickers, realized the importance of marketing while in the mentor program.

“I learned getting the word out about your business is key,” she said.

Another lesson the teens have to learn is how to fail. Aubrina Melville started Laundry Lambs as a junior at Enterprise High School. The endeavor, making all-natural wool dryer balls, was time-consuming and not as profitable as she had hoped. By her senior year she had started 292 Lamb Co., selling high-quality ewes, and was seeing a tenfold increase in her profits.

“It’s OK to fail. Failure is often the best way to learn how to move forward,” she said.

### Mentors help guide teens

The Mentor Match Teen Entrepreneur Program features speakers and trips touring businesses started by entrepreneurs.

“Mentoring comes from a variety of those who went to college and entered the work force to young, crazy entrepreneurs who were millionaires by their 25th birthdays because they took enormous risks,” Green said.

She mentioned a VIP trip the group took to Microsoft where they observed innovations few have seen.

“We have seen things only 300 people in the world have seen,” she said.

The group also took a trip to New York City and met with Tyler Hays, owner of M. Crow in Lostine and entrepreneur furniture craftsman.

Green estimated that approximately 25% of the participants in the program have returned to Wallowa County, bringing their skills with them, and 10% have continued in pursuit of entrepreneurship roles.

Green said the program brings in businesspeople, many of whom “are desperate for anyone with an accounting background,” to speak to the teens.



Stacy Green/Contributed Photo

Joseph Charter School student Bayden Menton won the award for Top Producer in the 2021 Mentor Match Teen Entrepreneur Program. His business, Old School Cutting Boards, earned more than \$6,000 in revenue.

Another project Green mentioned, one started during the first year of the program, was Blue Mountain Boys Recycling. It was a curbside pickup service for household recycling. Five boys started the business, and when three graduated after the first year, the two returning juniors, Marcus Lynn and Erich Roepke, ran the business their senior year. Roepke continued the business in college, renaming it Intrepid Recycling and focusing on scrap metal from farms and ranches. Today, Roepke makes his living as a social media adventure entrepreneur, traveling around the world documenting environmental concerns through social media. Lynn started his career at the local Bank of Eastern Oregon branch and is currently the new accounts manager. In his free time, he coaches several youth sports teams.

Matt Perren, who created the idea for Blue Mountain Boys Recycling, returned to the county after receiving an accounting degree from Eastern Oregon University. He is currently the controller at Wallowa Memorial Hospital and received an MBA in June.

Funding for the initial three years of the Mentor Match Teen Entrepreneur Program came from the Oregon Community Foundation. The program is now funded and housed through Building Healthy Families.

“We underestimate our teens and how capable they are. We also underestimate how many teens want to come back and make this their home,” Green said. “By showing them different options, many have found a pathway back here and we are benefitting not just from their professional skills but from their involvement in the community.”



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## CROSSWORD PUZZLER

ACROSS

1 Whimper

5 Bend gracefully

9 Hwys.

12 S-shaped curve

13 Long-eared animal

14 Landscape or portrait

15 Pinch

16 Heaps (2 wds.)

17 Ostrichlike bird

18 Society newbie

20 Frosty

22 Was bold enough

25 Radio control

27 Got a good look

28 Army off.

29 Imprint firmly

33 Yeasty brew

34 Mischievous one

35 Shade of a color

36 Fellows

38 Sugarloaf locale

39 Lap dog

40 Grocery buys

42 Fiddled idly

43 Moored

46 Follett or Kesey

47 Pharmacist — Lilly

48 Field

51 Flout, as authority

55 Thickened, as pudding

56 Baby, maybe

57 Linen color

58 Plea at sea

59 Slight advantage

60 Make cloudy

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1 Me, in Marseilles

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3 Moist

4 Like some crystal

5 Melville captain

6 Lab animal

7 — -Magnon man

8 Auburn tint

9 Inclure

10 Stop dating

11 Court order

19 TV host Sullivan

21 Percent ending

22 Do business

23 Auel heroine

24 Tall grass

25 Cheese sellers

26 Data

28 Flu bug

30 Not we

31 Salad veggie

32 Pay attention

37 Any miss

39 Reflect deeply

41 “Too many cooks ...,” e.g.

42 Kiri — Kanawa

43 Not as great

44 Bogus butter

45 Repartee pros

46 Curly cabbage

49 “Get — of that junk!”

50 Work unit

52 Nature (pref.)

53 Thurs. follower

54 “The King and I” name

110 Announcements

110 Announcements

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HOROSCOPES

by Stella Wilder

THURSDAY, JULY 8, 2021

YOUR BIRTHDAY by Stella Wilder

Born today, you know how to get from others precisely what you need, and whether those acquisitions directly benefit you on a personal or a professional level, it's ultimately all the same to you, for you approach each of these aspects of daily life in much the same way -- and what is good for one is, as far as you are concerned, good for the other.

FRIDAY, JULY 9

CANCER (June 21-July 22) -- Your judgment about what is favorable and what is not may be slightly skewed today; be careful that you don't inadvertently make things worse!

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) -- Reorganization will take more thought than hands-on effort, but you can surely get it done, provided you recuse yourself from a certain issue.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) -- You may be waiting for someone to commit to a new plan, and until then, you are not able to move forward. This pause can be put to good use.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) -- You'll receive clues that allow you to solve a personal mystery -- but in doing so, you're likely to raise a few uncomfortable private issues.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) -- Any difficulty you encounter today can be overcome by putting your head down and pushing through. Give no naysayers the time of day.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) -- You can have a good deal of fun doing something that others might consider nothing but work. You'll be operating in your wheelhouse.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) -- You may have to work hard to keep going today when others are trying to persuade you that time off is what you need. They are not wrong.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) -- You can expect to be interrupted on at least two occasions today -- but not for long. A conversation arises that piques your interest.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) -- A new endeavor is perhaps more interesting than profitable -- at least for the time being. You must decide exactly why you're engaged in it.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) -- You are approaching the "point of no return" with regard to a certain relationship. If you're going to raise that key issue, now is the time.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) -- What you do today is likely to be remembered -- but not for the right reason. You may have to engage in some "revisionist history" very soon.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20) -- You may claim that you're doing a certain thing for a certain reason, but those who know you best know what's really going on. Be honest.