

Green apprentice

Student entrepreneurs look for better ideas

By ROGER GREENE
COASTAL OBSERVER

It was a few minutes after noon on Tuesday and the computer lab at Georgetown Middle School was abuzz with activity.

The amount of energy in the room didn't come as a surprise, considering the roughly 30 students involved in the junior apprentice program were busy developing their concepts for a green business.

As he watched the students conceive and discuss business plans, potential customers and budgets, Bob Checkaneck, who has helped oversee the program in Georgetown County for the last six years, took a moment to absorb the passion and creativity on display.

"These kids are the future," said Checkaneck, assistant district director for SCORE, the organization that partners with the county Chamber of Commerce and other area organizations to run the junior apprentice program. "If we continue to invest in them right now, we will reap the rewards in the future."

The junior apprentice program is modeled after Donald Trump's successful television show, "The Apprentice," and the students are split into six teams. Each is charged with creating a concept for a green business from the ground up and have three days to define their endeavor, draft a business plan, present the plan and develop a 30-second commercial.

Judging will be held today at 11:30 a.m. in the Georgetown Middle auditorium. Bob Jewell, CEO of Brookgreen Gardens, will play the role of Trump during the judging, as he has for the last six years.



Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

Alejandra Avila, left, and Shemeika McCray work on a business plan for their eco-friendly garage.

"It gets very competitive," Checkaneck said. "As you hear the students talk, you learn they are concerned not only with their project, but who they think their toughest competition will be. Everyone has fun, but it is something they also want to win."

THE STUDENTS involved range in age from 13 to 16 and all attend school in Georgetown County. Six participants are from the Waccamaw Neck including Ian Becker, 14, and Alejandra Avila, 12. Both will begin eighth grade this fall at Waccamaw Middle School.

"I'm having fun," Becker said. "I would recommend this to any student. It's something that is very useful for the future."

To participate in the program, students must secure recommendations from one or more of their teachers. They are divided into teams based on

personal characteristics, traits and skills, and the goal is to have each team be representative of as many different schools as possible.

"We try to avoid having

students who know each other well on the same team," Checkaneck said. "We want them to adapt to new and different personalities, the same way they'll have to do at a job."



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"I think I'm a people person," Avila said. "I like making new friends. My teammates and I are getting along really well."

The competition took on a more eco-friendly outlook two years ago. Checkaneck says the switch has been beneficial to all who have been involved.

"Being environmentally conscious is the wave of the future," Checkaneck said. "Businesses that are unable to 'go green' don't survive."

Protecting "the environment is something we have to think about," Avila said. "If we don't fix the problem now, it will never get solved."

Prospective businesses in this year's competition run the gamut of environmentally friendliness. Becker's team chose a hydroelectric planetarium as its project, while Avila's team is focusing on an eco-garage. Ideas are chosen for their practicality as well as their innovation.

"There are no hydroelectric planetariums in South Carolina," Becker said. "As a business, we won't have much competition."

"We want to change en-

gines so they can be run on solar power," Avila said. "Our garage will help protect the environment."

SCORE is a volunteer organization that helps mentor small businesses and prospective entrepreneurs across the United States. Students participating in the junior apprentice program learn many of the same principles and concepts the organization teaches during its classes at Horry-Georgetown Technical College.

"I've been very impressed by how quickly they pick things up," Checkaneck said.

Since its inception, the junior apprentice program has benefitted more than 200 students. Former students are still in contact with the program, and several are part of the competition this year serving as mentors.

"In the years we've done this we've only had one complaint," Checkaneck said. "And that is that students wanted the program to last another week. It's such an uplifting experience working with these kids. You can see that the future is in good hands."