

Working With the Innovators

By Charlee Beasor

Madison County Focusing on Young Entrepreneurs

The old saying, “It takes a village” is appropriate in describing how Madison County is going back to its innovative roots and supporting young entrepreneurs.

The Madison County Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA) – for students in grades 6 to 12 – requires a heavy amount of community and business support to help students learn how to brainstorm ideas, turn those ideas into companies, present the companies to investors and secure funding.



Through the Madison County Young Entrepreneur’s Academy, Pendleton Heights High School junior Brandon Boynton created The Bully Box. It is a mobile application that allows students to anonymously report acts of bullying to schools.

The program teaches students more than business acumen; it also breeds confidence, says Madison County Chamber of Commerce Executive Vice President Angela Barbosa.

“The students who have come out of it, some will continue with their businesses – but the experience they’ve learned and the confidence they’ve gained is incredible. People who could barely look you in the face can stand up in front of 100 people. It’s the self-discipline and confidence that grew for these students,” exclaims Barbosa, who also runs the YEA program.

The community volunteers are a major part of the program’s success, with 40 to 50 adults helping through the 30-week after-school course.

“Madison County’s roots are entrepreneurial,” Barbosa notes. “It’s a great time in the life cycle of Madison County. What we see this program doing is re-seeding entrepreneurship on one hand and also allowing students to connect at a young age with what Madison County is about.”

The first class of YEA students graduated in May, with products and innovations such as mobile apps and games, candles that use essential oils to keep various bugs away, hand-painted canvas shoes, lawn care service and more.

Brandon Boynton created the Bully Box app, which allows students to anonymously report acts of bullying. A local and regional winner, Boynton was one of six finalists competing at the America’s Small Business Summit in Washington, D.C. in mid-June. He did not make the cut to the final three.

The Purdue College of Technology at the Flagship Enterprise Center in Anderson hosts the program.

RESOURCE: Angela Barbosa, Madison County Chamber of Commerce, at www.getlinkedmadison.com/yea

Studying ‘Unlikely’ Entrepreneurs Through Ice House Program

Becoming a successful entrepreneur or small business owner can pose a number of challenges. But thinking around those problems – especially in the face of adversity – is what 10 adults in Whitley County learned to do during the recent Ice House Entrepreneurship Program.

The program, based on the Clifton Taulbert book *Who Owns the Ice House*, teaches attendees how to think like an entrepreneur, look for various opportunities, find the answers to questions and solutions to problems that aren’t being solved, says Whitley County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) President Alan Tio.

“In the case of the *Ice House* book, it’s about someone who is an unlikely entrepreneur. Clifton Taulbert’s uncle, he lived in the deep south, in the Mississippi Delta, which didn’t promote risk taking or going out on your own,” he explains. “The book is about this guy who did (go out on his own) and some ideas as far as what people saw in him and what set him apart.”

The Whitley County EDC offers a number of programs as part of its Small Business and Entrepreneurship Initiative. Built on a base of manufacturing and agriculture, the county is working to bring young professionals back to the area, and programs such as the Ice House are part of that goal.

“Thinking like an entrepreneur means taking risks, being adaptive, experimenting, being creative, really focusing on once you have a path forward the process of repetitions and improving and building your capabilities,” Tio concludes. “It’s very relevant to our economic development. And what programs and services we offer, we want to make sure they’re relevant and consistent.”



Whitley County’s Economic Development Corporation offers programs throughout the year to bolster entrepreneurs, including Lindsey Hively, owner of Poptique Popcorn.

RESOURCE: Alan Tio, Whitley County Economic Development Corporation, at www.whitleyedc.com

Society Honors Innovation in Seven-County Region

In Starke County, spearmint is being grown for its antioxidant properties to preserve food. Mary Hunter, from Gary, has had her meat marinating sticks featured on national television, in *The New York Times* and now on the shelves at Target. And Winamac was home to Ralph Braun, inventor of the first wheelchair-accessible van.

These are just a few of the innovations and innovators that have been celebrated by the Society of Innovators of Northwest Indiana over the past 10 years. Founded by Ivy Tech Northwest, the society is part of the Gerald I. Lamkin Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center.

John Davies, managing director of the Lamkin Center, notes that the society is the “only organized regional initiative discovering and celebrating innovation on a regional basis sponsored by a regional campus.

“We exist to discover and encourage, to honor and celebrate innovators and innovation in our backyard. Not on Mars. Not in Chicago. Not Indianapolis. But the seven counties of Northwest Indiana.”

The society has inducted over 300 individuals and teams. Thirty new members are added each year and up to six can be designated as fellows. Prizes – such as the Gerald I. Lamkin Award for Service and Innovation to the World, or the Chanute Prize for Team Innovation – are awarded to individuals and teams for outstanding innovation in the region.

“It’s a journey of discovery. Who would have thought 10 years ago that we would discover that first, innovation is everywhere – across all sectors, from teachers to engineers, from start-ups to established companies – and it affects everyone,” Davies emphasizes. “Innovation is the lifeblood of the region, as we say.”

The society is governed by a 13-member board of governors, and events are held throughout the year to celebrate innovation across the region.

Ralph Braun was honored for inventing the first wheelchair-accessible van.



RESOURCE: John Davies, Society of Innovators of Northwest Indiana, at www.nwisoi.org