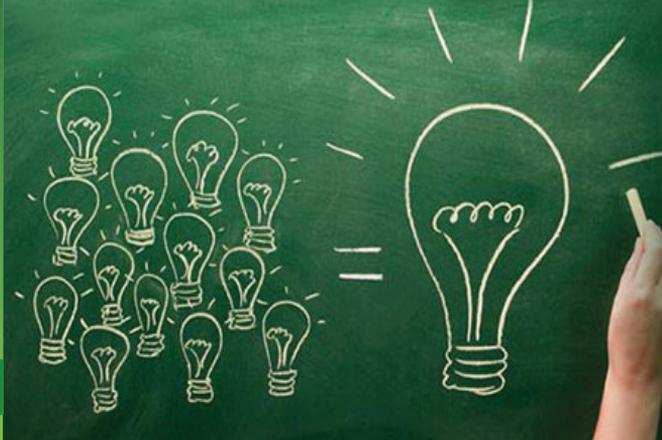


COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO BENEFIT AISD STUDENTS

By Toni Garrard Clay



THE ATHENS CHAMBER of Commerce is teaming up with Athens ISD to bring a bit of the “Shark Tank” experience to some high school and middle school students. Just as the reality television series has aspiring entrepreneurs making business presentations before a panel of potential investors, so, too, will the Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!).

The YEA! program curriculum will be provided by the chamber, under the initiative of its president, Mike Coston, who has seen the program at work in other communities. “This enables students to learn how businesses are run, and the young people who are involved are transformed into confident entrepreneurs,” said Coston.

The Young Entrepreneurs Academy takes place after normal school hours over a period of seven months and is made up of three major components: 1) idea generation and opportunity recognition, 2) business plan development, and 3) the launch of a new enterprise.

“The students will have mentors who educate them on what is involved in starting a business,” said Coston. “The goal is that at the end of the year, these young entrepreneurs will conduct market research and then present their business plans to a panel of judges to request funding.”

The immediate need is for members of the business community who are willing to act as mentors and be panel members, an effort in which the Athens Economic Development Corporation intends to participate. “We’re looking for active sponsors, who will help educate and mentor young people,” said Coston. “I’m very excited about this, because it involves a partnership between our schools and our community.”

If you are interested in lending your business acumen to help empower young people to greater success in their lives, or if you are the parent of an interested middle or high school student, please contact Coston at 903-675-5181. Only 24 students, ages 11 to 18, will be allowed in the program, which runs Novem-

ber through May. The application process includes a written essay and personal interview. And, as Coston points out, interested students do not need to already have a business idea, just a desire to own a business.

Lisa Denton, director of the Athens Economic Development Corporation, is excited about the renewed energy being poured into yet another partnership — this one between the AEDC, AISD and Trinity Valley Community College. The partnership addresses the local, and indeed national, need for certified machinists.

Machines in the manufacturing industry may be controlled manually, by a machinist, or by computer numerical control (CNC), which means the machine is automated. CNC machines produce precision parts and large production orders with no variances, but must be programmed and operated by a CNC programmer/operator.

To address the need for machinists and CNC programmers and operators, the Athens Economic Development Corporation is providing a training facility along with the costly equipment necessary. Both were made possible through an earlier Economic Development Administration grant. Athens ISD and TVCC students will receive instruction from college staff, and high school students will receive college credit for the courses taken. At the end of the one-year curriculum, students who pass will have earned certificates in machining or CAD/CAM-CNC operation, making them highly employable.

“In today’s market, talent is the new incentive,” said Denton. “By revitalizing and growing our training initiatives, which are made possible through community partnerships, Athens becomes a stronger player in the very competitive world of industrial recruitment.” 

EXPLORING THE COMMUNITY ROLE OF AEDC

