

Entrepreneurial Program Catches On At Rural School

By Dee George, Contributing Editor

A rural Minnesota school with fewer than 500 students in K-12 has started an entrepreneurial program that's created a lot of excitement - and profits - at the school.

Students either work in the school's wood and metal shop making custom signs or in an outbuilding creating Pure Goodness Bath & Body products.

The school purchased a laser engraver and CNC plasma cutter through Sourcewell, a service cooperative that offers savings to schools. Working in the school's wood and metal shop, students have all the tools they need for sign making and creating other items for sale.

Fifteen students elected to be part of the first year of the entrepreneur program that runs from late morning to early afternoon.

"Many students grab lunch and want to come back and work on their own time," says shop teacher Mike Barthel, who works along with other staff members who teach bookkeeping, marketing and business skills.

Students work in teams to learn different aspects of the business, from creating the product to taking orders and customer relations.

"So many students don't think they are able to own a business," Barthel says. "In today's day and age, you can reach anyone in the world online. This gets them to think that if they have a good idea, they can be their own boss."

Besides making custom signs for farms and lake homes (ranging from \$20 to \$100), the student business is licensed to make signs with the North Dakota State University Bison logo. One student took the initiative to email the Scheels sporting goods store in Fargo, and the store agreed to sell the NDSU signs there.

Other students work at making products for Pure Goodness Bath & Body in the school's football concession stand. Supplies and products are stored on wheeled racks that can be moved during home games.

"Students go to different stations including accounting and marketing, and they rotate so they get to experience all the areas of the business," says Jenn Wolfenbarger, community education director who oversees the students. The bar soap making is more time consuming, so she and an assistant and one student take care of that. Other students, including some in the special education program, make other bath products and put together gift and sample collections.

Since starting in late 2018, students have already developed new products using goat milk, natural oils and fragrances, and essential oils.

The experience from the program pays off in many ways, even though students can't be paid while earning class credits, Wolfenbarger says. Students who worked during the summer were paid, but during the school year they keep track of work time. Administration is working on a way to offer scholarships based on students' time and profits made after material costs and other expenses.

She has been impressed with the skills and initiative students have shown in less than a year of the entrepreneur program. They were featured on a Fargo television station, followed by TV advertising that increased sales for the sign business, which is called NextGen Bears after the school's mascot.

With more students interested in the entrepreneur class next year, teachers may need to set up an application process, and the school may need to add space to



Students at a rural Minnesota school are offered a hands on approach to learning business, making custom signs for farms as well as bath and body products.

accommodate the business growth.

"It's amazing to see the students blossom. From the beginning to now they have grown socially and matured having to work with the public and staff members," she says.

"I think it's more real education," adds Barthel. "They work hard and see the real world connection. The names of students who constructed and packaged the items go on the invoice, so they learn the importance of doing the job right," he adds.

Items can be purchased during school hours or online at the Pure Goodness and NextGen Bears websites.

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Easy-To-Move Gate Posts

Old tires can be used to make low-cost portable "gate posts", making it easy to set up gates wherever you need them, says Stewart Drabble, Holstein, Ontario. The swinging gates hang on posts held in place by concrete-filled tractor tires.

Drabble places a steel or wooden post inside an old tractor tire and then fills the tire with concrete. He then mounts hinges on the post to hang a 12 to 14-ft. gate. He uses a front-end loader to move the posts.

Matthew Ring in Nova Scotia borrowed the idea from Drabble, who is Ring's wife's uncle. Ring uses truck or car tires on his farm and says they work well with his subcompact tractor.

"Tire posts are great for changing the configuration of small paddocks. Using metal gates with the posts makes it easy to adjust the layout to whatever we need," says Ring. "We use 6-ft. tall, 4-in. square wooden posts treated with pine tar. Since our use is primarily for rotational grazing, the wood makes it easy to use screw-in insulators for running electric fence wire. We can easily scoop two gate posts into the loader bucket to move them around, and we can lift the gates off by hand."

He says the nice thing about this setup is he doesn't need to have fence posts in the ground. "If we want, we can pasture graze one year and make hay on the same ground the next year. The portable posts are cheap to make, and we don't have to worry about them rotting in the ground."

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Temporary fence posts were made by setting wood posts in tires filled with concrete.



Plastic Press Juices Apples Fast

Don Peterson doesn't let any apples go to waste since he built his own cider press. A garbage disposal turns apples into pulp, then a hydraulic ram squeezes the juice through a press made out of plastic pipe.

"I must have drilled a million holes in the heavy-duty plastic pipe to make the press cage," says Peterson.

The apple press and disposal are mounted on a 6-ft. high framework of scrap 2 by 4-in. steel tubing. Mounted on the left side is a small sink Peterson welded out of stainless steel. The garbage disposal unit mounts beneath the sink. "I use a French fry slicer to cut the apples into pieces that will fit the disposal," says Peterson.

The 14-in. dia. press cage, hydraulic cylinder, and plunger are centered in the steel frame. The press cage rests on a shallow stainless steel pan that drains into a bucket.

As the apple slices are pulped, they feed into a plastic pipe that angles down and into the press cage. "I tried just dropping the pulp into a bucket and then dumping it into the press, but that took too much effort," says Peterson. "I hooked up the pipe, and the pulp drops right in."

When the cage is full, he activates a hydraulic cylinder with an extra long ram mounted to the top bar of the frame. It is powered by a small electro-hydraulic pump.

"The plunger is a piece of plastic that's sized to the cage and mounted on a metal plate. The end of the ram presses into it," says Peterson. "The ram is long enough to push to the bottom of the cage and then pulls back up and out of the way."



Electric-operated garbage disposal crushes apples into pulp. A hydraulic-powered press then squeezes out the juice through hundreds of holes drilled into a big diameter plastic pipe.

Aside from the disposal unit and the plastic pipe that Peterson bought new, the rest of the cider press system was put together from salvaged parts.

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