

# Students start real businesses with community support

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Union County High School's brand new INCubator Edu program will be coming to a head in May, and those involved are asking for community sponsors to help build the program and support the students.

The high school hosted community leaders and entrepreneurs of Union County for an informational fundraising luncheon on Friday, Feb. 10.

INCubator is a yearlong class that trains students in the ways of entrepreneurship, and kids get to create their own real business startups.

Throughout the course,



Community stakeholders joined students of the new INCubator Edu classroom for a tour and a luncheon on Friday, Feb. 10.

students interact directly with business professionals from around Blairsville and Union

County, with each student group receiving a volunteer community mentor to guide

them along their way.

At the beginning of the year, students team up and work to solve a problem that doesn't yet have a solution, or to provide a service that is lacking in their community, all while learning how to conduct market research, product development, and more.

Coming up on May 11, students will be presenting their final pitches to a panel of business professionals from around the community, something akin to the TV show "Shark Tank." A winner will be selected, and that group's presentation video will be sent to the national competition for a chance to compete in person in Chicago.

"There are many expenses required to make this opportunity a success," according to program literature. "The students need materials for their businesses and travel to the final competition, and we want to provide a prize scholarship to the winning team. So, we are raising \$8,500 to make this happen."

"The students want to earn their way as well, and will also be raising funds on their own, as teams and as a class. We are asking you to join us in supporting these students and making this possible. We are asking you to invest in the students, in our community, and in our future."

INCubator Edu is a first-of-its-kind program in Georgia, with Union County High being the first school in the state to implement the entrepreneurship curriculum.

One of the big reasons the program is so groundbreaking is that it teaches students how to start a real business, and by the end of the course allows them a shot at getting their businesses off the ground.

"The program lives and breathes with community involvement," said Josh Davis, INCubator Edu instructor. "We've had a lot of community involvement, and I have to say, the community in Blairsville has been awesome as far as the involvement that has taken place with this program."

"I am new here this year, and I have been just amazed by the willingness of everybody to get involved and come in and work with these students."

Mike Kiernan, co-founder of Panel Built, has been an advocate of the INCubator program for several years, as he believes in a future where students graduate high school and start businesses in the community, instead of having to build their lives in other communities away from home.

"If we support this program, I will guarantee you, in a number of years, kids are



Mike Kiernan of Panel Built was an extremely early proponent of the INCubator Edu classroom, and he continues to champion its mission of encouraging and supporting young entrepreneurs toward success.



John Davis is the INCubator Edu instructor at Union County High School.



Union County Schools Superintendent Dr. Fred Rayfield and Union County High School Principal John Hill.

going to come back, and they're going to be providing jobs," said Kiernan.

During the luncheon that day, students met with members of the community to show off the hard work they've been doing since August.

"This feels like a good opportunity," said senior Buck Martin, who is part of a group that has come up with an exciting medical innovation. "I really hope we can take advantage of it and run with it, and hopefully start our business. I think that'd be a great opportunity doing that coming out of high school. I love the thought."

Team Mentors for the 2016-2017 school year are: Belinda Anguelo of Capsaicin eXtreme Marketing, Rita Gunter of United Community

Bank, Mike Kiernan of Panel Built, Daniel Liberatore of Chick-fil-A, and Chris Wadley of Lamin-X.

Community Coaches have been as follows: Patrick Malone, a local radio personality; Luke Colwell of Colwell Construction Company; Whitney Barnard of The Scribble Studio; Jason McCarter of United Community Bank; and David Hand, AVP, Orasi Software.

Those interested in becoming a sponsor of the INCubator Edu program, or finding out how to contribute to the program, including becoming a "shark" during the May 11 final presentation date, can contact Davis at (412) 216-6198, or Becky Dyer at (706) 897-9470.

## Litter...continued from Page 1A

and also takes a variety of recyclables.

There's even the Convenience Center next to the Union County Arena off GA 515, and it, too, takes a variety of recyclables.

But really, why should people who don't litter suffer because others decide that the world is their trashcan?

For Leslie George, who heads up the North Georgia Resource Management Authority, which houses Keep America Beautiful campaigns in Union, Lumpkin and Banks counties, the solution to the problem is a community approach toward educating individuals.

"We want to put a spotlight on litter," said George. "We want people to understand that litter is a problem for everyone. It costs a lot of money for the county to clean it up. It's not cleaning it up - it's not putting it down in the first place."

"Keep America Beautiful has been trying for over 50 years to educate people not to litter. What are we talking about today? Litter. What does it take to get people to not litter? They wouldn't walk through their living room and just throw stuff from their pockets on the ground. Why do they walk through the world and throw stuff from their car on the ground?"

According to George, one of the main forms of litter is untarped loads, though it's fairly easy to predict the most common types of litter to be found, including discarded food containers, lottery tickets and illegally dumped household garbage.

"What we want to do is get people to focus on the fact that there is a problem of litter in Union County," said George. "It's a quality of life issue. It



George and Union County Clerk Jennifer Queen

affects your neighborhoods, it affects the property values of your neighborhoods, it impacts businesses wanting to come in.

"If they see a heavily littered area where they may be looking at buying land, they're not going to be interested in buying the land there. So, it's a quality of life issue."

George has several tools at her disposal when it comes to fighting litter. There's the Adopt-A-Road program and the Great American Cleanup, as well as other initiatives like public education around recycling and the impact of litter.

Another way she works to tackle the problem is through building on each community's collective sense of social responsibility to change the habits of those who litter by asking people to report it when they see it happening.

The county is currently working to get a hotline up and running that will allow residents and motorists to report people who litter via their tag numbers, the result of which will be a nice letter asking the person to please

stop littering.

George has been battling litter for nearly 30 years, and in the end, it's a common-sense issue she wishes more people would stop to consider.

"Look out the window where you live - why wouldn't you care?" said George. "You get to live in one of the most beautiful places in the world. Why would you trash it up? It makes no sense to me at all."

Added George: "I'd love to say that I've seen an improvement in, what is it, 27 years now? I can't say that I've seen an improvement. We still are fighting the same battle, we still have the same amount of litter. I know that I've cleaned up so many miles of road, and I don't want to do it the rest of my life."

"That's not the answer, cleaning it up isn't the answer. It's getting people not to do it in the first place. And I don't know what's so hard to wait until you get to where there's a trash receptacle."

George and her associate, Ashley Rubio, visited the Union County Commissioner's Office to discuss litter last week.

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