



# Quabbin Valley Voices

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## Biz Venture program aims to develop young entrepreneurs

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Special to The Recorder

**Y**outh in the area who are thinking of starting a business can get extra help through Biz Venture, a business quest for teens and young adults ages 13 to 22 which will begin on March 22.

The program will be announced during school assemblies, tables during school lunches, media, social networking and other events. There will be tables during lunches at a variety of schools in the North Quabbin area.

Youth will have the opportunity until April 22 to take an on-line quiz to assess their business and

career goals and readiness.

They can then prepare a two page business idea on-line for public review, create a table display and prepare a one-minute pitch for their idea.

Throughout the process, they can get assistance at the Yes headquarters at 26 South Main Street in Orange. Classes to assist youth in developing their business ideas are planned at the Orange headquarters during April vacation.

Panels of judges will evaluate and score the business ideas

On May 5, at a banquet at the Athol-Orange Elks Club, those involved will unveil their displays, make a pitch and possibly win a prize.

The youth will set up their table displays prior to the banquet, the judges will score them and the public can view them.



Shane Barberion, 20, Tiffany L'Ecuyer, 18, and Travis Growey, 20, all of Orange, at the YES center. Mike Phillips photo

After that, everyone will sit down to dinner and during desert the youth will make their one-minute "elevator" pitches to the entire audience, which will score them.

There will be entertainment while the scores are being finalized. Cash and in-kind prizes will be awarded to the winners. There will be 10 prizes awarded in each of the three age categories: ages 13 to 15, ages 16 to 18 and ages 19 to 22.

Those interested in participating, according to Diana Wheeler, Youth Network Coordinator for YES, must live or have a permanent residence in the nine North Quabbin towns. If two youngsters want to start a business, at least one of them must live in the North Quabbin.

Over the summer, youth can make money doing odd jobs through the YES Oddjob squad or possibly begin running their business.

"Some of the simple ones we hope will start up over the summer. During the 16 months, we hope, the more involved businesses will start up. The more involved ones may take longer to prepare and do a full business

plan for," said YES founder Tim Cohen-Mitchell.

The program is also looking for mentors in the summer for hands-on experience in one form or another. "Also, we are looking for guest speakers and field trips to businesses.

"The idea is to try to build the community around the youth."

During fall and winter of next year, those interested can write a full business plan for a contest with the prize being start-up

funds. The youth will be assisted in this through workshops and classes and over the winter at YES.

At the business awards the following spring, the best plans will receive start up money for their businesses. "Then through Biz launch we will match youth with mentors and possibly provide business space to help start their business up."

Biz Venture, according to Cohen-Mitchell, is not any one idea, but rather is a business plan competition they have been holding for the last three or four years.

"We recognized that, having held after-school and summer-time classes we weren't seeing as many kids attend because of

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## Biz Venture

Continued from previous page transportation issues as well as competition from other interests — including computers and video games.

"Kids were finding other ways to occupy themselves. They were not as interested in spending time in class as sitting on the couch destroying aliens."

According to Cohen-Mitchell's research, entrepreneurial and business classes were also disappearing from the high school curriculums in the area. The need to reach out and let youth know about these subjects was there.

This need, he continued, has been accelerated in recent years "because we have seen 8 million jobs disappear since 2008 and most won't be coming back.

"At the same time, there is a huge competition for entry level jobs in this economy. And for youth with little or no experience, these opportunities have dried up.

"The avenues that youth had to earn money in the past — paper delivery, odd jobs, seasonal employment — have pretty much been taken over by adults."

Both youth and adults in this area and others need jobs, he continued, "and the people who are primarily responsible for creating these jobs are entrepreneurs, yet we have no system to help people become entrepreneurs."

"Right now in America, entrepreneurship is left to chance. Businesses pop up and fail 60 percent of the time due to internal mismanagement.

"If you talk to a lot of people who run successful businesses, they were exposed early due to a business in the family, Junior Achievement or Scouting.

"In this region we wanted to try something new. Our long-term future is dependent on what we do now, especially with young people.

"The sooner we start, the sooner, hopefully, we will see results.

"Research shows that the best way to help entrepreneurs succeed is to have a community culture of entrepreneurship. Families, neighborhoods, town governments, educational institutions, youth organizations and business communities all valuing, encouraging and rewarding entrepreneurship."

When developing the program, he continued, "We looked at what worked and what didn't work for us over the last 12 years and looked around the world at other programs and practices, and have take the best among those and combined what we have come up with an experimental model that is very comprehensive.

"We are looking for funding through sponsorship as well as volunteers for the program."

Biz Venture is a regional collaboration between the Young Entrepreneur's Society, the North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce, the towns of Orange and Athol, the Orange Innovation Center, the Young Leaders council and local schools.



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