

Edwardsville CEO Students Launch Virtual Trade Show

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EDWARDSVILLE – The Edwardsville CEO program will launch a virtual trade show on Friday, May 8. Originally, this trade show was set to take place in person at SIUE. However, due to the current social gathering restrictions, the event will pivot to a virtual platform.

The Edwardsville CEO (Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities) program is made up of high school seniors from Edwardsville High School, Metro-East Lutheran High School, and Father McGivney Catholic High School. The program provides entrepreneurial education throughout the school year, led by the local facilitator, Hannah Allison. The CEO trade show, held annually every spring, allows students to showcase the innovative businesses and concepts they developed to the community.

“Since August, our CEO students have spent many hours touring local businesses and visiting with guest speakers, affording them the opportunity to learn how to successfully own and operate a business,” said Allison. “Students work together in the fall to run a class business and then switch gears in the spring to develop and launch their own

individual business. The lessons they learn through these experiences and community connections will provide them with the tools for success, no matter which career path they choose and we're very proud of all they have accomplished this year."

On April 15 and 16, students pitched their business ideas in a virtual elevator pitch competition to some of the area's most accomplished business leaders who served as judges. Local judges included: Bonni Burns (BAM Marketing Agency), Sen. Jason Plummer (RP Lumber & Illinois State Senate), Jay Beard (Goshen Coffee/Boulder Holdings, LLC), Matt McSparin (Edison's Entertainment Complex), Steve Cooper (First Mid Bank & Trust), Dr. Timothy Schoenecker, PhD (SIUE School of Business), and Jo Ann Di Maggio May (Small Business Development Center at SIUE).

Many students chose to work the current social distancing restrictions into their businesses plans in unique ways. One student, Sam Lewis, adapted his business, Okeanos Bottle Company (okeanosbottle.com), for the current times. Sam creates custom hydro dipped water bottles and donates a portion of his proceeds to The Thirst Project. He decided to use his spare time at home to create additional bottle designs including a special orange and black design to support the seniors at EHS who have had their year cut short. In addition, he started The Mask Project Edwardsville where he has created 3D printed masks with filters to donate to local nursing homes and front-line responders. As of May 1, 203 masks have been donated with more to come.

Next week, the CEO students have the opportunity to participate in a national pitch competition hosted by Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship. Each week, Edwardsville CEO students' login to the Midland Weekly Series to connect with all 56 CEO programs from across 6 states, a pool that includes roughly 700 students, to hear from guest speakers and connect on a national level. Midland's 30-second pitch competition gives students a national platform with which to launch their business as well as the opportunity to collect winnings from a pool of \$2,500.

Edwardsville CEO is funded through the generous support of area businesses, individual business leaders, and civic organizations. For more information about the program or upcoming virtual trade show, please visit the program's website at www.edwardsvilleceo.com, their Facebook page or contact facilitator Hannah Allison at facilitator@edwardsvilleceo.com.