



# Riverbend CEO Program Making Good Progress for 7th Year

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter  
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ALTON - The Riverbend CEO program, which teaches local high school students how to start their own businesses, has been off to a successful seventh year so far in 2023. Program Facilitator Katie Sabolo appeared on [a recent episode of Our Daily Show! on Riverbender.com](#) to discuss the program, and some of the students talked about their experiences and businesses.

“We’re having a really great year,” Sabolo said. “We’re getting into a lot of different businesses, meeting with a lot of different business owners, and the kids are really making great progress both on their class business and on their individual businesses.”

The year-long, two-credit high school course doesn’t meet in a traditional classroom - instead, it meets at local businesses for 90 minutes each day for a school year. Students start their own real, viable businesses, and the program is funded by [business partners and investors](#).

This year, there are 11 high school seniors in the program from several area schools, including Alton High School, Marquette, Civic Memorial, and one homeschooled student. The entire list with more information about the 2023 CEO Students is available [here](#).

Zak Kallal, an Alton High School senior, is starting a cookie business with his family’s own recipes that go back generations to his great-great-grandmother. He said he’s enjoyed interacting with local businesses during the program.

“My favorite part of the program is going around the community and just seeing the businesses,” Kallal said. “I may not know this person from this business, but I know the guy who knows that guy for that guy, and it’s just interesting to me.”

Kallal added that the program is a great way for students to branch out into their community.

“I would say the reason you should is to break out of your shell and see the community,” he said. “You may be the most social person in your class, but until you’re out seeing everyone, what’s the point of being talkative?”

Jacob Schaper, this year’s only homeschooled student, is starting a piano tuning business called “Note To Self.” He said one of the best parts of the program are the business connections you can make.

“It’s been such a great experience that I’ve been able to meet all of these businesspeople and form connections that, no matter where I end up going, I will have all these great business connections that will serve me in the future,” he said.

Jake Brey, an Alton High School senior, is starting a dessert business named “Treat Yourself,” which he sees as a stepping stone towards his dream of owning his own restaurant one day.

“My favorite part about the program is actually something I learned from it,” Brey said. “I learned that there is no formula for success - it comes in every shape, size, and color.”

The Riverbend CEO program is hosting a catered dinner and silent auction fundraiser on Friday, Feb. 24 from 6 to 8 p.m. at Your Event Space, located at 515 E. 3rd St. in Alton. Sabolo said they’re also currently seeking investors and event sponsors. Tickets are \$25 and can be [purchased at this link](#).

To find out more about the Riverbend CEO program, visit their [website](#) or [Facebook page](#). The full interview featuring all 11 of this year’s Riverbend CEO students is available below and on [Riverbender.com](#).