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Home-grown talent

Nebraska has a vital interest in promoting long-term economic stability for its communities, large and small. A key factor is helping young people develop the skills and knowledge they will need to run Nebraska business enterprises.

Nebraska youths need a strong understanding of economics. They need to learn about the real-world requirements for keeping a business viable, whether the small-town print shop or the big-city financial services company. On that foundation will rest much of the state's future.

Fortunately, Nebraska can boast a variety of youth entrepreneurship efforts. Here are two notable examples.

First, consider the good news in Valley County, in central Nebraska. In 2005, a county task force came together to develop a strategy for promoting entrepreneurship education. Schools in Ord formally incorporated such instruction into their curriculum, and other schools in Valley County host business-related forums and speakers.

St. Mary's Elementary School in Ord has had particular success. Children in the fifth through eighth grades created 31 student businesses that sold more than 1,000 items and generated sales of more than \$4,000.

A successful entrepreneurship program by sixth-grade Girl Scouts in Valley County was featured in the national Girl Scouts magazine.

The youth entrepreneurship program by the 4-H in Valley County has become a statewide model, with a training session in Ord for more than 100 teachers and agricultural extension educators.

Crucial to the success of such efforts are the enthusiasm and leadership of individual educators in Ord and Valley County — educators such as Derry Trampe, Angie Cargill, Mindy Conner and Joan Williams.

Nebraska has success stories in encouraging youths to become entrepreneurs.

This afternoon, Arcadia High School is scheduled to host a Youth Entrepreneurship Forum in which students will hear four business owners from central Nebraska describe the fundamentals of their businesses and keys to keeping them successful. The students also plan to tour three businesses.

Another Nebraska success in promoting entrepreneurship is found at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

In 2006, Entrepreneur magazine analyzed entrepreneurship education programs at more than 120 comparably sized universities — and in its final rankings the magazine placed UNO in the top 10.

Each summer, UNO hosts rising high school seniors for a weeklong camp on entrepreneurship. The program targets six communities in particular: Omaha, Lincoln, Columbus, Norfolk, North Platte and Scottsbluff. UNO also sponsors an annual business plan competition open to all UNO students.

UNO's Maverick Entrepreneurship Institute, which receives valuable support from partners in the Omaha business community, provides both undergraduate and graduate courses. In a forward-looking move, the institute encourages cross-campus cooperation within the University of Nebraska to afford students opportunities in regard to medical research, information science and engineering.

Praise is also due UNO's Nebraska Business Development Center for its long-standing work in providing consulting, workshops and other help for small businesses.

The more that young people can be helped to develop their talents and leadership, the healthier the state's economy will be. Efforts such as these in Valley County and at UNO are valuable building blocks in that cause.



Nebraska Excellence