



MEDIA RELEASE

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919 N Broad Street • Brooksville, FL 34601

Entrepreneurial students host tradeshow, pitch businesses

Brooksville – Middle and high school students convened at the Hernando County School District's main office on Tuesday for the Virtual Enterprises (VE) and Virtual Enterprises Junior (VE-JV) Ventures Career Academy's 2024 Tradeshow & Pitch Competition. This annual event invites students enrolled in Entrepreneurship to present their best product pitches for fictional products they've developed before a panel of judges. The students were also the host for a trade show where adult visitors and audience members could visit with the student entrepreneurs, ask questions and make "purchases."

Some of the impressive and creative products presented at the event included Power Pedal (SHS); Seasoning Machine and Surf Energy (WWHS); Where's My Fur Baby (FCMS); Momenti and Digiscribe (PMS); and The Shock Clock and Snackin' Stanley (DSPMS). The judges for the pitch competition included Liz Casner, Hernando Chamber CETA Board Chair; Dr. Radiah Dent, Wilton Simpson Technical College; Lindsey Hack, Spherion Staffing and Recruiting; and Kelly Castro, Career Source Pasco-Hernando.

The Pitch Competition winners include:

1st place – *Seasoning Machine*, presented by Alex Collitto, Jace Hendrickson and Hassan Henry

2nd place – *Where's My Fur Baby*, presented by Emily Smart, Fox Chapel Middle

3rd place – *Surf Energy*, presented by Lilly Charwood and Sophia Cote, Weeki Wachee High.

Winners *Seasoning Machine* is a product that introduces the 'Cooking Munchster', a "revolutionary" seasoning that will change the taste of even the worst foods to taste like cookies. In their pitch, the student team explained that the Seasoning Machine would offer different flavors, including seasonal flavors. "We all have younger siblings," said Alex Collitto. "This will take the ick factor out of veggies. Just sprinkle it on your disgusting food and it will turn your frown upside down!"

The trade show featured tables from the pitch competitors, as well as Active Vital (EK8), Zip Zoom, H!Gene Machine and LinkCarriers (WWHS). The adult "shoppers" each received a virtual credit card with \$2,500 to spend at the various businesses. "Everyone did such a great job," said Beth Lastra, Supervisor of College and Career Programs. "Not only do they make their pitch to an audience, but the students learn how to develop all the intricacies of their pitch and prepare to think on their feet while answering questions."

The VE-JV courses offered to middle schools include Technology Applications for Business offered in sixth and/or seventh grades, with the VE-Junior Ventures offered in eighth grade. For high schoolers, the Tech Apps for the Entrepreneur is offered in ninth and 10th grades, and the Virtual Enterprise offered in 11th and 12th grades. "All of our businesses across the United States are buying and selling from each other, forming a virtual economy," said Jillian Berg, Managing Director of Programs with VE International. "They have their own banking system, and use money to put back into the economy by buying from other businesses."



Schools offering the programs include Fox Chapel Middle, Explorer K-8, Parrott Middle, Powell Middle, Hernando High, Springstead High and Weeki Wachee High. During the 2022-23 school year, there were 15 middle school and 116 high school entrepreneurship and small business certifications earned by students. There were 348 college credits earned, totaling more than \$40,000 saved in college tuition. To learn more, visit the College & Career Program webpage here <https://www.hernandoschools.org/departments/college-career/index>



From left: Lilly Charlwood and Sophia Cote with Surf Energy; Emily Smart with Where's My Fur Baby; and Alex Collitto, Jace Hendrickson and Hassan Henry with Seasoning Machine.



DSPMS students Makayla Girard and Ava Oliveros pitch Snackin' Stanley.



Springstead High students Ciara Marrero and Xadrian O'Neal pitch their business, Power Pedal.

