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Stop and enjoy a cup this month and support future entrepreneurs

Stop at lemonade stand this month, help future entrepreneurs

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Published: May 8, 2014 - 10:22 PM | Updated: June 11, 2014 - 01:45 PM

Burton Morgan Foundation of Hudson initiated the program in 2011

If you see a kid selling lemonade this month, take a moment and enjoy a cup.

You might be helping to train a future business owner.

Lemonade stands will be popping up in some area communities throughout May as part of National Lemonade Day, a program that teaches students how to create a business plan, obtain a loan and market a product — in this case, that sweet, tart delight most commonly associated with youthful entrepreneurship.

This past weekend, youngsters from Seton Catholic School in Hudson hung out their shingles throughout downtown, First & Main and the Acme Plaza under colorful names like Electric Lemon and the Yellow Jackets.

“I always liked to sell things,” Yellow Jackets co-owner Ben Ligan said while hawking pink and regular lemonade, as well as baked goods, Sunday afternoon in front of the Learned Owl Book Shop. “This is a good way to learn how to run a business.”

He spent much of his time running up and down the street, coaxing potential customers to the stand where his fifth-grade partners, Emily and Gina Mineo, served customers. The team took advantage of a captive audience, turning drivers into customers and donors to the charity they hoped to benefit: PAWSibilities.

Other Hudson schools will take their turn in the coming weeks, and stands also will sprout in Akron, Bath, Canton, Streetsboro, Windham, Bath Township and a handful of other areas where teachers have become fans of the program.

Lemonade Day was an idea born in Houston in 2007 and eventually caught the attention of Burton Morgan Foundation of Hudson, which implemented the program locally in 2011.

The first-year pilot involved 250 students from Hudson and University School.

Participation grew to 1,200 students in 2012, then 1,800 last year. This year, the goal is 2,000, a figure that includes some Akron schools that started Lemonade Day as an after-school program.

The National Lemonade Day organization provides the material for a 14-lesson curriculum that meets common core standards in such areas as language arts, economics, math and social studies, said Jessie Jones, regional director for the Lemonade Day Northeast Ohio affiliate.

Once the students have a business plan in place, they take their vision to a loan board set up at each school. Students are discouraged from looking to their parents for the loan, Jones added, because well-meaning parents might be tempted to tell their children they don't have to return the money, “and we want the kids to have an authentic experience, and that means repaying the loan.”

Last week, students from Hudson's East Woods Elementary made their pitches to the loan board, some dressed in business attire, others hauling in PowerPoints or colorful presentation displays.

Fifth-grade teacher Steve VanderSchie said the whole process builds confidence.

“We really like to see their self-confidence go up. Right before they go before the loan board they have butterflies in their stomachs and they’re nervous. Then they come out with smiles on their faces and are eager to sell,” he said. “It’s a big deal to present in front of people they don’t know.”

Pat Fritz, one of two fifth-grade teachers at Seton, with a total of 50 young entrepreneurs this year, added that children who don’t grow up to be business owners still learn much from the experience.

“They learn to work as teams and how to come to consensus,” she said.

They also learn to respect and admire the skills of others.

“At the end, when they’ve paid back their loans and given to their charities, they’ll say things like, ‘I had no idea so-and-so was so artistic’ or ‘I had no idea they were so great at organization,’” Fritz said. “They really get to appreciate the different talents of everyone on the team.”

Lemonade Day can be implemented at just about any grade level, worked into the school day or done after hours, and youngsters can sprout their lemonade stand anytime during the year. But most opt for the original goal of the program: A splash of lemonade stands in May.

Each team gets a three- to four-hour window to sell lemonade.

“Their first priority is paying back the bank, and you can see they take it very serious,” VanderSchie said. He has seen kids counting their money on sale day, saying, “I think we got it! I think we got enough to pay them back!”

The students generally make enough to keep some profits for themselves, but they are also encouraged to donate some proceeds to a charity.

The Life-Size Lemons from Seton chose March of Dimes after discovering that fifth-grader Corey Strazek’s brother was born premature.

On Sunday, Carson Kurht and Tyler Ligan wore yellow shirts as they jumped and hollered on the sidewalk to draw attention to their business, while Corey and MacKenzie “Mac” Pierce waited for customers.

“We wouldn’t have gotten a lot of customers just standing here,” Mac explained.

The team sold lemonade, “fizzy” lemonade, candy bars, Dunkin’ Donut donut holes and chips in front of Verizon Wireless on Kent Road. Verizon allowed them to sell \$10 gift cards and split the cost.

Handmade Mother’s Day and other greeting cards — made by partner Emily Wedding, who was home sick Sunday — were a sellout.

Teammates decided who would have what job by discovering each member’s talent.

“We learned everybody’s skills,” Tyler said, “and used those skills to help us.”

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