

## **Free Assistance And Even Locations Offered To Potential Business Owners**

Recently members of Bellevue's Downtown Development Authority (DDA) answered questions and concerns from a group of local entrepreneurs interested in opening new businesses. Stating concerns such as location availability and the current absence of certain desired services, DDA members assisted the group with the prospects of opening a business in this area along with providing key information to encourage their business success. What made this meeting inspiring was the fact these future business owners were not out-of-town speculators or franchise owners of any kind, but simply local high school students.

Today Bellevue's DDA offers a unique opportunity for entrepreneurs, regardless of age or experience, to assist anyone who would like to open a business. The program addresses steps to take in starting a business all the way from beginning with only an idea through opening to the public, including mentoring with active business owners or, in Bellevue's case, offering free locations, advertising and even signage. Obviously resourceful members of Bellevue's DDA hope this progressive approach will attract and keep businesses of any size or service active in a village where several empty storefronts serve as reminders of too many businesses come and gone, some within only a year's time.

"The Youth Entrepreneurship Program being offered is part of a Generation E project. The instruction is designed to help students who want to start their own business and remain in the community," said DDA member and local business owner Ron Rademacher. "Courses are available for middle school and high school students and a course is available for other entrepreneurs and residents who have left school up to the age of 26."

Generation E Institute of Battle Creek offers entrepreneurship education by training advisors and educators who then assist members of their individual communities in launching a business and keeping it running. Bellevue High School and Bellevue's DDA have a combined six trained and accredited instructors ready to assist anyone with business ideas of their own.

In May, Battle Creek will host The Ninth Annual Generation E Student Business Showcase which is an event designed to celebrate student business plans. The criteria for participation in the Showcase is an educator-approved business plan and operational business. Along with hearing guest speakers, attending workshops, and the opportunity to display or sell products and services, participating students make presentations to judges who will then award winners in various categories. During the Battle Creek 2013 Showcase, students received over \$5,250 in cash prizes.

"Upon completion of any of the courses the participant will be ready to launch their own business," said Rademacher who saw how this program helped a high school student open a fishing lure business in Escanaba, MI, starting by renting counter space in a hardware store and now having grown to become a steady income for the individual, allowing the young entrepreneur to live and build his business in his hometown without leaving to find work elsewhere.

Village manager Travis Brininstool shares the board's concern for keeping downtown business in Bellevue vibrant and successful, acknowledging how every member of the community benefits when businesses occupy open storefronts. As one of the accredited instructors of this entrepreneur program, Brininstool is available to speak with anyone who would like to share their concept and dream of owning their own business, big or small, in downtown Bellevue.

Those interested in learning more about the Youth Entrepreneurship Program, or with questions regarding opening their business in Bellevue, are welcome to call Travis Brininstool at (269) 763-9571 or by attending any of the monthly Downtown Development Association meetings open to the public every second Monday of the month, 10am at Village Hall.