

Start-Up Cecil springs teens into business world

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NORTH EAST — On Thursday, aspiring young entrepreneurs from across Cecil County gathered at the North East Library to present their business ideas at Start-Up Cecil, a small business contest held by the Cecil County Arts Council in conjunction with the Cecil County Public Library.

“I think one of the biggest goals of this program has always been having the teen see that being an entrepreneur is always a viable option for them and something that they can think about for a future career,” said Katelyn McLimans, youth service & outreach manager for Cecil County Public Library.

According to McLimans, the first Start-Up Cecil was held in 2015. The event has been happening ever since, except in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-related cancellations.

The contest aims to allow young business-minded individuals to come to a seminar type of environment to learn what it takes to create a business plan, and eventually pitch their idea to someone. The event is open to rising sixth-10th graders.

According to McLimans, there are two sections to Start-Up Cecil. The first section of the event from July 11th to the 13th, was the half-day workshops that lasted from 10 a.m.-2p.m. At these workshops, the teens meet with library staff as well as business mentors to learn about starting a business.

The second part of the event was on July 14th where the eight business ideas were pitched to three judges. Each person or team was evaluated on the quality of their pitch as well as their written business plan.

After deliberation by the judges, Ainsley Carillo was declared the first place winner for her presentation of Ainsley’s Dog Biscuits. Athalia Valenciabonilla’s Let’s Get Knotty claimed second place. The

third place winner was Oluwatunmise Ogoh for her idea, Lemonade Delights.

Carillo's business idea is to make dog biscuits that are homemade, healthy and affordable.

Carillo, who is 14 years old, was not expecting to win first place at the event.

"I actually was not prepared," Carillo said. "I did not think I was going to win. I saw so many different designs, so many different ideas. And I was blown away, so it was wonderful."

According to Carillo, she will use her \$100 winnings to purchase an oven to help produce more of the dog biscuits in an easier and faster way.

Valenciabonilla, 12, says her passion for crochet comes from her mother.

"So, at first my mom taught me the basics," Valenciabonilla said. "I felt like giving up because it was so hard. And she told me to keep going, to not give up and follow your dreams. And that's exactly what I did. And that took time, but it was the effort I put into it that I really enjoyed. I am passionate that way.

According to Valenciabonilla, she will use her winnings towards materials to help her crochet business.