

Hardin Co. program teaches kids about entrepreneurship

BY TERESA BJORK

Fifth-grader Gabe Crandall wants to create the next pizza empire. Gabe has developed a business plan, hired his classmates as employees and purchased the tools needed to launch his business.

Never mind that the pizzas are made from Play-Doh. Thanks to an innovative, hands-on learning program, Gabe and his fellow students from Alden Elementary School are getting their first taste of entrepreneurship.

This spring, every fifth-grade class in Hardin County took part in the Entrepreneur for a Day (E4D) program. Offered by the Hardin County Community Endowment Foundation (HCCEF), the E4D program teaches young students how to create and grow their own businesses.

The project is sponsored by the Hardin County Farm Bureau; Ellsworth Community College in Iowa Falls, which hosts the students on campus; and the HCCEF.

Although the students are still in elementary school, it's never too early to teach kids how to start a business and manage their finances, said HCCEF Chair Carol Gibson. "They need to dream. They need to envision what their future is," said Gibson at a recent E4D event in Iowa Falls.

"Entrepreneurship sounds like a huge word to fifth graders, but when you bring it down to their level, they probably already are an entrepreneur. Whether they have a lemonade stand, whether they are mowing grass or baby-sitting, they have skills they can use to earn money, and that's the basics of starting your own business."

Young entrepreneurs

The E4D program, designed by the John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center at North Iowa Area Community College in Mason City, is taught in several elementary schools in north-central Iowa.

During an E4D session, stud-



Hardin County Farm Bureau member Joy Reinert offers business advice to fifth-grade students from Alden Elementary School at a recent Entrepreneur for a Day event at Ellsworth Community College in Iowa Falls. The students were creating pizzas out of Play-Doh for a lesson in how to launch a successful business. PHOTO/TERESA BJORK

ents design a product using Play-Doh and then try to market or "sell" the product for a make-believe profit.

After observing a "Play-Doh economics" lesson in action, the HCCEF members were so impressed by how the kids got excited about entrepreneurship that they decided to bring the program to Hardin County, Gibson said. They turned to the Hardin County Farm Bureau to help support the program for a three-year run.

"When looking for a partner, we asked who has the same mission; who is really committed to youth, to education, to farming and, absolutely, to entrepreneurship; and who has a county-wide impact. That put Farm Bureau right at the top. It made them our perfect partner," Gibson said.

In addition to the entrepreneurship training, students receive an Ag in the Classroom lesson later in the spring. An agribusiness

entrepreneur visits the classes to discuss career opportunities in agriculture.

"The ag-related part is important to our community and Iowa, because we definitely are an agricultural state. And I think kids need to learn that," said Joy Reinert, a Hardin County Farm Bureau member who also serves as an E4D coordinator.

Business skills

This year, Hardin County's E4D program was a two-day

event offered to more than 250 fifth-grade students throughout April and into May.

On the first day, an E4D facilitator visits the classroom and explains business terminology. Students also learn leadership skills. The second day brings students to Ellsworth Community College, where they learn how to develop a business plan, track cash flow and borrow money.

Students break out into business teams, and one student in each team is chosen at random

as the entrepreneur who leads the project.

The teams buy "tools," such as plastic utensils, rolling pins and cups, and start mini-assembly lines to create their Play-Doh products. One student manages quality control, making sure each product is uniform; another student handles marketing and creates a logo and slogan for the product.

"The kids learn an awful lot, and they remember what they learn," Reinert said. "They learn that only by cooperation and working together are they really successful as a business."

At the end of the day, students tour the Ellsworth Community College campus to encourage the youngsters to plan future careers.

Community benefits

Gibson said the goal of the E4D program is to show young students that they can grow up to become job creators, rather than job takers.

The program has already inspired one student to launch an egg-laying chicken business, using start-up funds he borrowed from a bank.

Supporting entrepreneurship is vital to rural communities, Gibson stressed. New, successful businesses create jobs for local residents, as well as a second income for Iowa farmers.

"We need to teach the future generation...because the next business people are coming out of these classrooms," Gibson said.

