

## PRESS BUSINESS

## EDUCATING ENTREPRENEURS

## STUDENTS VIE WITH BIZ PLANS AT VIRTUAL SHOW HELD AT LIU

BY CLAUDE SOLNIK

At a recent trade show and business plan presentation competition held at Long Island University Post's Brookville campus, a business group unveiled a product that could attract investor and consumer attention.

DogGo, with its slogan "Go FURther," offered dog collars and harnesses with fitness and security features, such as GPS, vitals trackers, and step counters. High-tech pet health was definitely here, or almost.

But don't look for that product or company — at least not yet. This was an entry from students at Smithtown High School East at a business plan and trade show booth competition held primarily for Long Island schools. It was all part of the Virtual Enterprises Long Island Regional Business Plan Competition and Trade Show, hosted by Long Island University at its Post campus on Jan. 9-10.

About 3,000 students, 150 teams, around 80 middle and high schools, primarily on Long Island, and nearly 100 judges including LIU faculty and deans, joined for this example of entrepreneurial education.

"They were professional, knowledgeable about what their companies developed, and most of all they were proud of their accomplishments," Matthew Griffith, who teaches the VE course at Riverhead High School, said of the students.

Virtual Enterprises International is a national nonprofit that runs an educational program where students learn about business by running a business in the classroom.

Since 1996, VEI has served more than 250,000 students in classrooms and through competitions, such as the recent one at Long Island University, which serves more than 15,000 students at its Long Island and Brooklyn campuses.

"There are Virtual Enterprises classrooms across the country," Shari Linker, VEI's director of marketing and communications, said of about 400 schools. "They're not selling real goods, but the process is real."



DogGo was among the business ideas students pitched at LIU Post.

The Virtual Enterprises program is part of each school's curriculum, designed to simulate "all aspects of starting and running a business, including a virtual banking system," Linker said.

The Long Island Virtual Enterprises program is one of the largest communities within the VE system.

"An entrepreneurship class focuses more on the individual," Linker said. "This is an entire company. We're teaching them presentation, collaboration with other students, different roles."

Classes function as companies, not simply as students sitting and learning from teachers.

"The classroom literally decides on a service or product. They come up with an idea," Linker said. "They each have roles. Someone is CEO, CFO, marketing, human resources, employees."

They come up with an idea for goods or a service. Virtual Enterprises provides virtual dollars to spend and make sales.

"Competitions and trade shows like this allow high school and middle school VE students to meet each other, exchange business ideas and even sell to each other," VEI President Ali Shama said.

Michael Berthel, Long Island University's vice president for student affairs and enrollment management, said the school's participation is part of its "commitment to experiential learning."

"These high school students receive valuable and lifelong lessons in innovating, developing and running a business," Berthel added.

Students from Easthampton to Westchester showed off their creativity in front of judges.

"What an amazing opportunity to serve as a judge for the VE competition," said Phil DePaul, who leads various companies. "High school me' is so jealous of the opportunity these students have."

Virtual companies ranged from customizable hair products (Hairvana, Plainview-Old Bethpage John F. Kennedy High School) to high-tech dog collars (DogGo, Smithtown High School East).

There also was Pack A Party from a New Hyde Park Memorial High School team, and Smart Scents Essentials Aromatherapy, and Dried Delights, all from Syosset High School.

At Your Service came out of West Hempstead High School; Café Fusion from William Floyd High School, and Continental Cuisine from Bridgehampton High School.

"You want them to come to your booth and take an order on site," Linker said of booths offering mock products, mascots, marketing and brochures.

Booth Design Gold Awards went to Fits4Fans, Memory Lane Toy Co., and AI AID, all from Miller Place High School; H2Grow, Jericho Senior High School; Elite Events, Centereach High School; and Cloud Co., Patchogue-Medford High School; R & R Solutions and SpiritBoost Smithtown High School West; Supercharged, Deer Park High School and smooVE, was born at Connetquot High School.

"It's not a real product," Linker said. "But everything else is real."

The LIU event is one of various regionals leading up to the Youth Business Summit in April at Jacob Javits Convention Center in Manhattan.

Winners receive recognition but not remuneration for business plan pitches, marketing, human resources and other tracks.

The creativity clearly was real and in some cases, real products paralleled what was shown. Smart dog collars exist, including PetPace. If you like DogGo's idea and presentation, you might be able to get a product for your pet.

As to DogGo, which had a strong showing from product to presentation, keep your eyes peeled not just for the company, but for these and other entrepreneurs. The experience, if not the companies, are real.

"VE gives all students a chance to apply what they have learned in the classroom to real-life scenarios," said Susan Hanlon, VE coordinator at the G.W. Hewlett High School's Business Education Department. "It's exciting to see students shine when they are presenting their business plan and they realize that they're capable of sharing such intricate business knowledge in such a professional manner."