

Local high school students learn the ropes of running a business

PFEW program offers insights into American free enterprise system

BY LESLEY KISTNER

VP, communications/marketing, CBICC

For nearly four decades, the internationally acclaimed Pennsylvania Free Enterprise Week (PFEW) program has focused on educating Pennsylvania high school students about the American free enterprise system, immersing future leaders in the world of operating a successful business.

Since PFEW's inception 39 years ago, over 42,000 students have graduated from the program. This summer, a total of 2,108 students attended PFEW, including 28 students from the State College Area and Bald Eagle Area high schools.

During one of five intensive week-long sessions held at Lycoming College and the Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport, student teams form imaginary companies which they run for a three-year period using a computer simulation. They also develop marketing strategies for their product, and create logos, websites and other advertising materials. At the end of the week, two key competitions – the stockholders presentation and the marketing/advertising presentation – test what students have learned from the decisions they've made.

Along the way, students also receive invaluable lessons in leadership, communication, and other key topics delivered by motivational speakers and representatives from Pennsylvania's business community. Ultimately, they learn that PFEW is much more than a business camp.

"I was thoroughly impressed by nearly all of the speakers that came from all over to teach us about business. But more importantly, they taught me about life, and how to be the best person I could be," said Bailey Stoltzfus, a State College Area High School student.

Fellow State College Area High School student Caycee Ohl added, "Pennsylvania Free Enterprise Week provides students with a solid economical and theoretical understanding of what happens in the business world. PFEW is more than just a business camp, it's a life camp."

Bald Eagle Area Junior/Senior High School student Kaleigh Cunningham agreed.

"I now realize even more the importance of setting goals and working hard to get those. This camp changes students for the better, and is a special lifelong memory I will always treasure," she said.

The program is equally as rewarding for the



Photo Courtesy of PFEW
Bald Eagle Area Junior/Senior High School student Kaleigh Cunningham (back row, second from left) poses with her Week IV, Lycoming College team, Company C1 – ETAN, a watch company.

adult volunteers, whom the Foundation for Free Enterprise Education, which runs PFEW, calls the "heart and soul" of the program.

Each summer, 120 volunteers are needed to serve as Company Advisors, men and women from the business community who serve as mentors to the student companies. When you take into account travel to and from Williamsport, training and the week-long commitment, advisors contribute a total of 10,452 volunteer hours to PFEW.

Among those volunteers is Centre County Controller Charles Witmer.

"I have served as a volunteer in various youth programs for nearly 40 years, and in my opinion, Pennsylvania Free Enterprise Week is, without a doubt, the most valuable, informative and 'formative,' dynamic, life-changing program for today's youth that I have ever experienced," Witmer said.

Witmer agrees that PFEW is definitely more than a business camp; it is a "life camp" that teaches young adults about the American Free Enterprise System and so much more, like integrity and character, and personal management skills that they can use in whatever career path they choose.

Lesley Kistner, Vice President of Communications and Marketing for the CBICC,

is another long-term PFEW volunteer. She started as a guest judge for the marketing and advertising competition, and for the past five years has served as a Company Advisor during

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Week IV at Penn College.

"PFEW provides a tremendous opportunity to help mentor future business leaders," she said. "It's rewarding as well to see the

transformation that takes place in the students over the course of just a week. Young people who were complete strangers quickly begin working as a team and build bonds that continue for many long after the program concludes."

Every student – incoming high school juniors and seniors -- attends PFEW on a \$575 scholarship provided by private sector businesses, foundations, civic organizations, and even individual contributors.

Jeff Proch, owner and founder of University Wine Company, graduated from the program, and continues to support PFEW by providing scholarship funding so that others can attend.

"As a PFEW alumnus, contributing to the program has special meaning for me," Proch said. "My interest in free enterprise and entrepreneurship can be traced back to my experiences at PFEW. I was able to attend the program thanks to a scholarship provided by a local business. I am thrilled to be able to provide other local students with the same amazing PFEW experience that I had by contributing to the program's scholarship fund."

PFEW is operated by the Erie-based Foundation for Free Enterprise Education. For more information, visit www.pfew.org. ✧