

PFEW, PA Business Week Stress Value Of Business Education



Business education programs make a significant and vital contribution to the academic and career preparation of today's students. Here, **Karen Musante**, president & CEO for the Foundation for Free Enterprise Education, presenter of Pennsylvania Free Enterprise Week (PFEW), and **Val Laufenberg**, executive director of Americans for the Competitive Enterprise System (ACES), presenter of Pennsylvania Business Week, discuss the importance of these programs in our region.

Pennsylvania Free Enterprise Week is a one-of-a-kind summer program that offers in-coming high school juniors and seniors a unique and challenging opportunity to see what it is like to run their own business. Tell us what makes this program so special.

PFEW is powerful for many different reasons. First, students learn by doing. It's not a classroom. They are teamed up with total strangers so they quickly have to learn their team's strengths and weaknesses in order to be successful. Early on in the week, they elect a CEO from their group who is responsible for the overall operation of the company. Second, students live on a college campus for a week and experience independence and freedom, perhaps for the first time in their life. They live in the dorms, eat in the dining hall, and get a real insider's view of what college life will be like. Third, and most importantly, they hear from and interact with a wide variety of world-class speakers who deliver dynamic messages on leadership, entrepreneurship, communication, ethics, self-esteem, teamwork and other topics vital to their future success. It is a total immersion not only in business, but in life.

Student teams are mentored by an adult businessperson called a

Company Advisor who guides them through their week-long journey. Advisors are the heart and soul of the PFEW program because they work with their teams as consultants and peers. The students are treated as adults, perhaps for the first time in their lives. The Advisor's main job is to get their team organized and working well and help them prepare for the competitions at the end of the week. But their most important job is to never answer a direct question! They help students come up with their own answers and allow them to run their companies their way. That's the key to learning. The fact that these volunteers give up a week of their lives to help our students leaves a lasting impression.

How is PFEW different from other business education opportunities?

There are several things that make PFEW unique. Our college-level simulation is very realistic and it allows the students to experience the many facets of operating a manufacturing company. PFEW is totally hands on, and students have autonomy to run their businesses as they see fit. In addition to the business aspects of the program, PFEW students experience college life and independence. Since students are grouped with total strangers from diverse social, ethnic and economic backgrounds, they are introduced to many new and different

thoughts, ideas and lifestyles. They can be their true selves, free from any labels or baggage they may carry from home. They get a unique insight into the future workforce, and they learn critical skills that teach them to work independently and as part of a team to drive their companies to success. But, perhaps, the most powerful and unique thing about PFEW is that, in just six days, our students make lifelong connections and bonds that help form their very future.

The PA Business Week program is designed to allow teams of high school students to manage companies through a business simulation for an entire week.

How does Business Week work and what makes it so effective?

PA Business Week works by allowing an entire class of juniors or seniors the opportunity to see just how important skills like team work, time management and communication are to their future working career. In addition, it opens their eyes to how their in-school subjects, such as math and science, relate to workforce readiness. The schools assist us in forming teams of approximately 15 students, with guidelines for diversity. They are not with their friends, as they would be most school days. This is another lesson for the students on workplace culture and cooperation. Students

come away from the week with a new respect for the talents that other students have shown.

Throughout the week they are preparing for a variety of competitions, with each one highlighting a different career path, such as finance, sales, marketing, production and management. Students have the opportunity to experience the many career opportunities available to them, and ACES has aligned our program to also meet most of the PA Department of Education's Academic Standards for Career Education and Work.

What makes PA Business Week effective is the opportunity for all students in the high school class to receive this business education program. It is also effective by putting a local "face" on business to the students by bringing in local business advisors to mentor the students throughout the week. These business

volunteers are paired with an educator from the school and together they show the students how business and education are cooperating to prepare them for their future. Local volunteers have the opportunity to show students how business is thriving in their local community and what kinds of careers are available right here in Northwest PA.

ACES has just completed its 20th year of bringing PA Business Week to area high schools. What has been the impact of this program in our region?

Over 21,000 students from five northwest Pennsylvania counties have experienced PA Business Week. Some of those past participants are now returning to their alma maters as Business Advisors! Several schools have now been hosting the program for over 20 years because they see the benefits this program brings to their students. One of the major

goals of ACES is to establish and maintain collaborative relationships between local businesses and schools. Through this experience, business leaders and teachers acquire a better understanding of the role education plays in providing the future workforce with marketable skills.

What's the best way to support and learn more about PFEW and PA Business Week?

There are many ways to get involved and support the PFEW and ACES' PA Business Week programs. We are always in need of volunteers, and financial support is always welcome. We also both participate in the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program, which is tax deductible.

The best way to learn more about PFEW is to contact 814/833-9576 or visit www.pfew.org. For ACES, call 814/456-7007 or visit www.aceserie.org. ■

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