

From the Business First:

<http://www.bizjournals.com/buffalo/stories/2008/01/28/story8.html>

Young entrepreneurs get down to business

Premium content from Business First - by Tracey Drury

Date: Monday, January 28, 2008, 12:00am EST

Although she's just a high school junior at Leonardo da Vinci High School, Laeticia Mbukapindu isn't wasting any time on her plans to run a salon business.

Mbukapindu, a native of the Democratic Republic of Congo who came to Buffalo when she was 10, is already braiding and styling hair for friends and family. She's also honing her business skills as a participant in the Entrepreneurship Training Program run by the Meszaros International Center of Entrepreneurship, held in partnership with the University at Buffalo School of Management.

"I wanted to know more about facts about how to maintain and have a big business," she says. "I've learned how to address people in the business world and how to choose locations. This was a beautiful opportunity."

Mbukapindu is among the inaugural class of 65 high school juniors and seniors participating in the ETP program. Students meet Saturday mornings for three hours at UB, where they learn about ethical entrepreneurship, how to start a business and other lessons. The program concludes March 8 with a business plan competition.

West Richter, a senior at City Honors, signed up to help him succeed at his computer business, Richter Computer Solutions.

After graduation, he hopes to study business administration and music performance, while building his business on the side.

Richter likes the focus on ethical entrepreneurship, an area he has heard a lot about from his stepfather, who owned a general contracting business.

"They offer a lot of suggestions on how to get things started up and how to further initial ideas," he says. "The fact that 90 percent of small businesses fail, they help give you the information you need to succeed in a small business."

The ETP program was developed by UB professor Joe Salamone in 2000 as a three-week program for a group of visiting students from Hungary. After watching presentations by the students one summer, Laszlo "Les" Meszaros became interested and donated funding to develop a two-week intensive program in Budapest. The program was later expanded to its present format and Meszaros' foundation got behind it full force.

"It's been extremely successful there and when I started talking to some business friends here in the Buffalo area, they convinced me this program would be very much needed in the U.S. as well," he says.

Meszaros also had a personal connection: After escaping Communist Hungary at the age of 16, he arrived in the United States in 1956 with \$1 in his pocket, without a high school diploma and speaking no English. After many years of hard work and 12 years of college, he ultimately earned a degree in business administration and went on to success as a technology entrepreneur, ultimately selling his firm, Voice Technologies Group, to Intel Corp. in 2000.

"I have a passion for young people who have talent but are depressed or never had the opportunity to explore their skills and their abilities," he says. "Let's go back to what America was all about, the American dream. We can all achieve the American dream if we approach it the right way."

Initial funding of \$100,000 came through Meszaros' MICE Foundation, with an additional \$100,000 grant last year from the John R. Oishei Foundation. Other corporate sponsors include the Fatta Foundation, M&T Bank and Ciminelli Development, which provides office space.

Plans call for expanding the program next year and developing partnerships with nonprofit community groups, such as Boys & Girls Clubs.

Salamone says the program has a proven success in Hungary: Several students have gone on to open real businesses. Besides teaching ethical entrepreneurship, he says the program gives kids a chance to express themselves creatively in a format structure very different from traditional classroom courses.

"Part of my training is to empower people and get them to ask questions, speak up," he says.

Rather than giving kids three hours of lectures, the program includes a PowerPoint portion to introduce a concept; weekly guest lecturers who speak to the same concept; and an interactive journal portion to introduce discussion topics.

Salamone says he has fielded interest from neighboring communities in Niagara County and the Rochester area.

With the course outline, textbook and PowerPoint presentations already prepared, Salamone says he is open to building a franchise model to expand the program.