

Teens Get a Taste of the Business World

South Sumter junior wins \$1,000 prize in contest inspired by the television show, "Shark Tank."

By PATRICIA STEELE
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BUSHNELL

South Sumter High School junior Colby Pitts is \$1,000 richer after trying his hand as an entrepreneur.

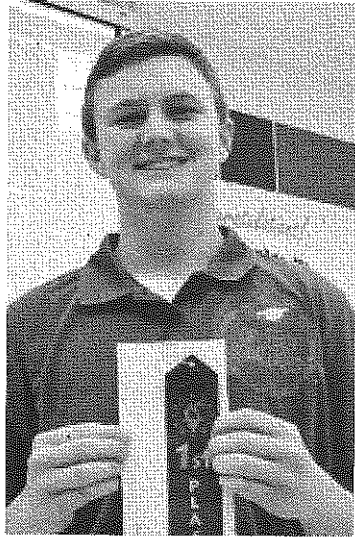
The promise of a big payoff proved to be a powerful incentive for Colby and 26 other South Sumter students who pitched their business ideas as part of the Raiders Entrepreneur Dreams project.

Students identified a product or service they felt the community needed, developed the idea and presented the products through a website, commercial and PowerPoint.

The five finalists pitched their business concepts to a panel of five judges. Each individual or team had five minutes to showcase their ideas.

Pitts' business concept, CP Tech Solutions, was aimed at customers who need assistance with the selection, installation and maintenance of technology, such as computers, televisions and media centers.

Pitts said he was really excited to win.



Submitted photo

South Sumter High School junior Colby Pitts took away a blue ribbon and a check for \$1,000 for his business concept during a "Shark Tank"-type competition.

"A thousand dollars is a lot of money," Pitts said. "It was a learning experience, and I'm still learning. I'm learning I have to pay taxes."

Pitts said he enjoyed the challenge of coming up with a business plan and creating the project. He also enjoyed the interaction with the judges.

"I really like technology, and I thought it would be appropriate to make this work for me," Pitts said. "I like the idea

of having a technology business in the short term, but my goal is medical school."

The Raiders Entrepreneur Dreams project, inspired by TV's "Shark Tank" show, is a pilot program at South Sumter and could expand next school year, said Larry Woodward, South Sumter High assistant principal.

South Sumter economics teacher Karen Cloud said it was mandatory for everyone in her class to take part in the project in one form or another.

"I wanted them to develop a product they would use, figure the cost to produce it, and feasibility, and think about how they would go about promoting and selling the product," Cloud said.

Cloud urged the students to think about their lives and create a product that would make life easier for them.

She was impressed by the ideas and the work put into the projects by students such as Brittany Gant.

"I remember in middle school all the girls lined up waiting to plug in their hair straighteners in the bathroom," Brittany said. "I always thought it would be great if you didn't have to plug in the straightener. So my friend Shaylin Johns and I decided to do the research on how to develop one and how much it would cost."

Beyond being introduced to the world of economics, the students also benefitted from the

OTHERS WHO WON

Other winners in the Raiders Entrepreneur Dreams project included:

Second place: BlueDreams, by Shaylin Johns and Brittany Gant. Their product was a wireless hair straightener that lasts up to four hours. It comes with a powerpack that can be recharged, similar to a cellphone. This team split \$500.

Third place: M&P Products, by Micah Lanham and Payton Cline. Their creation, the Projectima, is built as a feature or add-on to a phone or tablet device. Located near the camera, it allows the user to project the image on their phone screen. This team split \$250.

Fourth place: Mowsall, by Kevin Bedgood and Gabe Lucero. The team invented a cloth strap that attaches to the body of a lawn mower and the plastic grass chute. It's adjustable and allows the operator to lift the chute out of the way in order to mow near fences, plants and walls. The team split \$100.

Fifth place: StirAll, by Ally Liddington. Her product was straws or stirrers that dissolve into a drink. The straws are created from sugar or creamer for black coffee, or flavored fruit for water. She won \$50.

judging process.

"We had great judges who asked hard questions and really made the students think about their products," Woodward said. "And the students did a great job. They were very business-like as they accepted the judges' comments and critiques."

The judges — Jada Ciftci, Sumter County Economic Development; Trisha Holloway, Buffalo Crossings Assisted Living; Lloyd Singleton, Sumter County Extension Office, UF/IFAS; Mark Stephens, the Colinas Group; and Julie

Sweitzer, Lake-Sumter State College — represented many aspects of the economic world and provided insight and guidance for the students, Woodward said.

Woodward would like to see the project expand to include other schools in the county, so they could compete against each other.

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