

INNOVATE! Business Challenge

Hello, this is Karen Brooks with my Community Comment about an inspiring story about our youth. But first, I must confess how lucky I am to be the lead of an exciting educational program, the Innovate! Business Challenge, a high school business start-up competition. Ever watch the *hit TV show*, Shark Tank? We have our own version and tomorrow five start-ups will pitch their idea to a panel of judges who will decide how to invest about \$10,000 in cash. Many thanks to Rising Stars and Umpqua Bank our event sponsors.

After four years of competition it gives me hope to see how creative and innovative our young people are *if given a chance to dream, design and develop an idea*. The most important part *is taking their idea* and making it a reality. Most people are great with the idea part, but few jump in with both feet and implement their idea. The magic begins with the call to action.

Tomorrow, the Innovate! Business Challenge hosts an Evening of Inspiration showcasing:

- A sophomore at Fortuna High, Blaine Bryant, presenting Bryant Welding, custom fabricated metal art.
- A senior at Ferndale High, Enrique Lopez, presenting Enrique Lopez Photography.
- A freshman at Fortuna High, Alejandro Ramirez, presenting IMPRYM Brand Clothing, an urban streetwear company
- A junior at Eureka High, Henry Wotherspoon, presenting Fly By, drone education & online sales.
- And two seniors at Arcata High, Patsy Fraga & Jack Ruby, presenting Carnaval, a French bakery with a twist.

X The Challenge began five months ago when I pitched the contest to nearly 700 high schoolers. For those that submitted their ideas, they entered a process of coaching and business mentoring to select the finalists who'll stand before five judges, and a roomful of guests. They are all amazing.

Innovate is one of the six impact areas with the Decade of Difference, where entrepreneurialism, innovation and creativity are explored, not just in high school but all grades. Humboldt County has an entrepreneurial culture that values start-ups. Imagine what can happen when young thinkers are mentored and then have an opportunity to apply the principles, values and benefits of entrepreneurship and the Free Market system?

X So *be on the look-out for these youth businesses*. From Lemonade Day stands the first weekend in June, to middle school Crafting Up Business selling events to the Business Challenge; we're modeling and incubating our future business leaders. Here's where you come in...these young people need their community to embrace and support their efforts. I'm inviting you to invest in community-based economic development and help our young people create a job for themselves, and others.