

# GREEN APPRENTICE

## you're Hired!

by Judi Burton

**A**ges ago, the word “apprentice” was associated with someone who was on his way to becoming a craftsman. A young adult who was given the title held his chin high above his peers and society applauded his station. Carpenters, notaries, lawyers and blacksmiths were some of the many professionals who recruited the young to work with them closely and learn a skill or craft. After four to eight years of low pay and hands-on experience, their teachers either hired them as full-time employees or partners, or they moved to a new village where they could grow their own business or trade.

Today, our youth are mashed into overcrowded high schools, where it is easy to slip into a feeling of unimportance. They are herded through off-white cinderblock hallways and dumped into classrooms where they copy from an overhead projector for an hour. The teachers are handling hundreds of students each, and even the best have a hard time keeping them all on a path to success. Home life is often not much better. Eating at the dinner table is something many teenagers only see in the movies. Many parents have been forced to take minimum-wage jobs, and are working two to three jobs each just to keep the bills paid. Unfortunately, the only time many parents are able to interact with their kids is when they are tired, frustrated and downright moody.

The thought of going to university is becoming an idea only the rich kids can entertain. Now, more than ever, the American dream is becoming distorted and lost. Aspirations of becoming a big shot are being replaced by aimlessness and the overwhelming

urge to quit school and work at a fast food restaurant.

Georgetown High School has a dropout rate of 50 percent every year and growing. This statistic is shared across the United States in thousands of lower-income schools. Only 68.8 percent of high school seniors graduated in 2007, and the National Center for Educational Statistics reports only 33.28 percent of all high school graduates go on to college. As the economy falls and jobs become even scarcer, the pressure to skip higher education and go straight to work becomes a matter of survival.

So, where are the role models? Not the superstars on TV, s who often act outrageously just to get attention, but the real role models in the community who own businesses and are willing to really teach our kids how to become successful?

Myrtle Beach Counselors to America’s Small Business, or MB-SCORE, has developed a program with Georgetown County School System to help our teens learn how to become entrepreneurs. The Junior Apprentice Program is set up like the hit TV show *The Apprentice* with a real CEO as the judge. Freshman and sophomores are selected once a year during the summer break to undergo a one-week crash course in the basics of business principles. They are divided into teams of five or six, and are taught market research, finances, advertising, labor, credits and debits, and so on. At the end of the program, the students give a PowerPoint presentation to the CEO and several students who have already taken the course. Their plans are judged on whether or not a bank will

invest in their ideas.

This year, the program changed its name to Green Apprentice and challenged students to come up with a business plan geared toward an environmentally friendly business. A composting service company, an environmental law firm, eco-pet daycare, green cleaning and a homeowner’s halfway house were the entries this year. Bob Jewell, CEO of Brookgreen Gardens,

was the judge, and he said he had a hard time figuring out whom to pick.



“All of the plans were excellent, but there were just minor differences that helped me pick the winner,” Bob recounted. “None of them are losers.” The composting business plan received first prize, and was actually used for a real business to obtain a loan this year in Myrtle Beach. Bob went on to say: “This is the best week a student can experience in their entire academic career. These kids are learning terminology most people will never understand. It gives them a real sense of how the world works.”

Most of the students who participate in this program not only graduate from high school, but also go on to college. Elizabeth Wilson was a

project manager for the first winning team. Later, she entered the Future Business Leaders of America competition and won first place in the state of South Carolina. As her success snowballed, she attended the Wachovia Scholars Program at the University of South Carolina (USC) in 2008 and won a four-year scholarship there. She has obtained the International Marketing Internship from USC, and has recently returned from Spain. "This is an excellent program to serve as a foundation to propel yourself to success." Her favorite quote is "Goals are obtainable. The only true limitations are the ones you set for yourself." Elizabeth, who is now the youngest member of MBSCORE, has ascended from apprentice to mentor. She teaches workshops for the program and is a judge for the students every year.




When we turn on the TV and witness shouting matches over the economy and the degradation of the American way of life, it's hard to focus on the things that really matter. When we are old and gray, our children will be the ones in charge. It's scary to think that those very same people who we continue to ignore and cut funding on are the ones

who will be making the decisions. Maybe college isn't the answer for everyone. It is certainly too expensive for most of our kids to go to college without a scholarship. When they finally make it through all the hardships and obstacles in their way and graduate from that higher institute of learning, will they find a well-paying job to pay off the mountain of debt they have incurred? Most of them will never dig their way out.

Maybe it's time to start taking responsibility for our youth one kid at a time. A small business owner can grab a teen by the elbow and get him or her interested in something before they lose hope. Look around your schools and find that one kid you can mentor. Spend time teaching him or her your business. If you can't, find a way to help a youngster go to college without an overwhelming amount of debt.

*Natural Awakenings* will be taking a hands-on approach next summer by going out to find businesses willing to contribute to a scholarship program for the winner of the Junior Apprentice Program. We are looking for people who can help teach; donate computer program software, cameras for mock commercials or cash; or just be involved. It's time to take responsibility into our own hands and teach our kids regardless of education budgets and spending cuts. Don't just give them life; give them a chance at a good life.

For more info about the Junior Apprentice Program or MBSCORE, please visit [www.MBSCORE.org](http://www.MBSCORE.org).



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