

Internet Coast Co-Sponsors AMPS Entrepreneurship and Leadership Institute

PART OF THE DIGITAL DIVIDE INITIATIVE

By Van Hutchinson

When Rafia Chodhry made up her mind to make an impact in her community, she did what any self-respecting teenage girl would do: she picked up the phone. Chodhry, a National Honor Society student at Miramar High School, visualized many children receiving toys. So she called friends and friends of friends and boldly called on Toys 'R' Us to organize a toy drive for disadvantaged children. In three weeks, Rafia and her friends gathered 500 toys.

Chodhry was one of 25 youth chosen to attend the A.M.P.S. Institute held at the Holiday Inn at Sunrise Boulevard on Fort Lauderdale beach, May 21-23. A.M.P.S., or Advanced Minds Pursuing Success. James Amps, President of AMPS International hosted the 3-

day program designed to teach hands-on entrepreneurship and leadership skills to teens.

The event was co-sponsored by the InternetCoast, Citrix, Sean John, Lockheed-Martin, RISE Education Consultants, the Genius Project, Score High Services, North Broward Hospital District, the Florida Marlins, the Miami Dolphins, and Burger King.

The curriculum included leadership, business and entrepreneurship skills, and team building. Saturday morning, Reverend Milton Crunch of Mt. Olive Baptist Church told the students they could achieve remarkable success through unity and taking pride in their communities and backgrounds. Saturday's Breakfast keynote speaker, Dr. Carmella Sye Morton, president of RISE, pushed the students to deliver on their promises for themselves and their families because many students do not take advantage of their talents. Saturday's lunch keynote speaker was Barbara Till, founder of the Broward



Rafia Chodhry was one of 25 youth chosen to attend the A.M.P.S. Institute held at the Holiday Inn at Fort Lauderdale beach, May 21-23.

chapter of Youth Crime Watch of America. She emphasized the value of character and contribution. At the Professional Dinner, her husband, Dr. Frank Till, Superintendent of Broward County Schools, challenged the students to use their entrepreneurial skills to help society improve and move forward. He reminded the students that 50 years ago we didn't have cell phones, laptop computers, or plasma TVs. Dr. Till said their own creative initiatives will help establish business trends for the next 50 years.

Juan Casimiro, of Ascend Youth Entrepreneurship, taught extensively on business planning and emphasized the importance of a solid foundation for teamwork with an exercise where teams build the highest tower of total silence. Over the weekend, he provided instructions on how to plans and obtain funding.

James Amps, Director Institute, spoke on positive people and direction for one's life. InRoads illustrated her anecdotes from several which she competed.

Brian and Tera Faso taught the students business etiquette and

how to dress for success. They paraded an assortment of clothes, so the young men and women understood the difference between professional attire and casual.

The instruction was designed to be applied in a hands-on manner to the venture capital contest. Excitement was clearly visible as teams brainstormed their plans and developed new aspects in each instructional session. For example, one team conceived of a Web-centric device to simplify restaurant reservations. Teams worked to make Powerpoint



Juan Casimiro of YoungBiz International measures the “Tower of Power” in a team-building exercise at the A.M.P.S Institute.

competed to wood blocks—in course of the detailed write business of the A.M.P.S. associating with forming a Pat Johnson of remarks with marathons in

presentations and posters displaying the logo, slogan, and high points from the business plan. Students had access to a computer lab provided by AMPS with high-speed Internet.

The contest, held Sunday morning after teams scrambled well past midnight to refine their designs, was judged by a panel from AMPS and Ascend USA. In third place, Derel, Inc. won \$500 for an improved laptop / Game Station for teens. In the second place, \$1500 went to PYBI, Inc., which proposed a microchip solution to eliminate back strain from taking heavy books to school and back home. In first place, Able & M Enterprises won \$2000 for their socially aware daycare concept. Their plan was judged to be the most realistic and featured a 24-hour daycare center for low-income parents or single parents. Through public and private partnerships, Able & M would obtain all necessary permits and licenses and staff the center partly with interns. The logo was catchy, and the team put together a tri-fold brochure complete with professional-style copywriting and photos.



The Able & M team takes first prize in the venture capital business plan competition.

The teen teams showed a breadth of awareness of business terminology, explaining how their products would pass the “break-even” point and create a positive return on investment. Marketing schemes ranged from media blitzes to cool website design.

Two of the students flew in from Camden, New Jersey. Laura Pettus, 16, and Shabria Flack, 16, attended the Institute and shared their ambitions. Flack, a tall African American in 11th grade, aspires to open her own law firm.

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“I like to research, speak, and defend people. I like to talk,” she said, adding that she recently overextended her cell phone privileges.

Pettus, also in 11th grade, enjoys writing and poetry. She is a staff writer for the school newspaper, the *Wilsonian*, and aspires to launch a magazine for teens called *Young Black American*, or *YBA*.

“I want to tell teens about business skills, time management, and health. For example, I’ll write about how to prevent AIDS,” she said.

Elonzo Walker, 17, is in 11th grade at Hallandale H.S. He plans to overtake clothier FUBU with his own line of professional attire for the urban set. His strategy: “I’ll go into the community and get to know my target market. I want to show people I care about them.” Walker is learning about business through mentorship with James Amps.

Jeffrey Faluade, 18, of South Broward H.S., is enrolled in a special program for marine biology. Yet his entrepreneurial vision is automotive. After studying electrical and mechanical engineering when he begins classes at FIU next fall, he ultimately plans to create customized autos with his best friend.

The Institute was supported behind the scenes by volunteers like Karline Altemar, 20, a junior this fall at Lynn University in Boca Raton. She is president of the Newman Club, a faith organization, and is vice-president of the Black Student Union. She is studying business administration and journalism.

James Amps encouraged the participants to adopt the same collaborative model in their business enterprises. “You need to get out of your comfort zone and meet people you don’t know because through those relationships, you get in touch with the people they know. That’s how things get done in business.” He said, “It’s time we change the old mantra from “go get a good education and get a good job” to “go get a good education and create a job” Amps commented that he wants young people to be more creative with their lives and if they can work on their strengths they will never have to worry about their weaknesses.

Amps was pleased with the first A.M.P.S. Institute and are planning another in the fall. He commented, “It’s not just about business. It’s about giving the young people the entrepreneurial spirit, so they believe in themselves and apply these ideas whether at college, or in a corporation or any part of life.”

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Since it was the first time the program had been offered, some students had no idea what to expect. Luis Permomo, 17, from Northeast High School in Fort Lauderdale, remarked, “Basically I didn’t want to come, but my parents made me. But now that I’m here, I’ve learned skills I’ll use my whole life.” And Eric Martin Taylor, 15, a freshman at Stranahan High School, was buoyed by his team’s first place. He said he found a new interest in learning public speaking skills. His mother, Valerie, and his father Barry came out to the Sunday awards ceremony, calling the Institute “impressive” and “a positive influence on the kids. Our son now wants to speak as well as Mr. Amps, Valerie said, and for my son to want to speak, is amazing!”

A unique feature of the program, “AMPS Midnight Success Madness” was a big hit with the teens. At midnight on Friday and Saturday, the students gathered for focused brainstorming and planning of their five business plans. On Saturday at midnight, Amps, and chaperones walked the group across the street to the Atlantic Ocean. The group spread out and had space to themselves and was not allowed to talk with anyone for 2 hours. They instructed the group on the importance of meditation and reflection as the impetus for creativity and good business planning. Amps said, “When you look at the ocean, what do you see? Endless possibilities! That’s what’s ahead of you.” At 2 a.m. in the morning, that was impressive!

The A.M.P.S. Institute, created by James Amps hope to inspire young people to dream big and act on their dreams and encourage other students like Rafia Chodhry to pursue socially aware entrepreneurship. Since the retreat, Chodhry has started food and book drives and founded a ‘Best Buddies’ chapter at her school. The program pairs students from unlike backgrounds and they are encouraged to get out in the community and reinforce each other’s academic goals. In many cases, students with intellectual disabilities are teamed with honor students.

“I always knew I wanted to do something entrepreneurial, but I did not have the know-how,” says Chodhry. “The A.M.P.S. Institute has given me the resources I needed to take the next step. We’ve seen a lot of kids make friends with people they usually don’t associate with. A lot of them really do become ‘best buddies’ just through the program.”

The Institute plans to operate 4 retreats a year with year-round workshops at Devry University. Included in the education of these young adults are field trips to corporations

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and different businesses. The first trip for this group is in two weeks to CITRIX Systems in Broward County. They have a full day lined up to teach them about their business.