

A Community Effort to Create a Stronger Community
By Vivian Dunlap, The Eureka Reporter
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It's all around us.

In the Cutten/Ridgewood School District, where the third- through fifth-grade students mentor their younger peers in buddy programs.

It's at Eureka High School where seniors have to complete a senior project that incorporates community service.

It is at Humboldt State University, where there are personalized internship programs created for students to learn the ins and outs of their chosen field from the local leaders succeeding in them.

It's in the local businesses featuring local artists' work for Arts! Alive, and at the business whose goals for economic growth are spelled out in its title — The Small Business Development Center.

This county has proven it has a wealth of generosity, and a desire to promote growth and success; and it wants to fuel the local economy, which is why leaders from just about every industry generously volunteer their time, knowledge and expertise to competitors in the Economic Fuel competition every year.

To name a few, there was Michael Kraft, executive director of the North Coast SBDC, who developed and presented new workshops this year to meet competitors' needs.

Mike Thomas, business instructor and director of the MBA program at HSU, will offer a new business plan writing class each fall specifically for Economic Fuel competitors and business students.

Helen Edwards, Business Department coordinator for College of the Redwoods, said there has been a 67 percent increase in demand for business classes from fall '05 to fall '07 — since the Economic Fuel competition has been established.

Chuck Smith of the Rotary Club of Southwest Eureka came up with the idea to offer an honorary membership to one of the competition's winners.

This year the Humboldt County Office of Education collaborated with Economic Fuel coordinators, as well, to provide the first Young Entrepreneurs Business Challenge for high school students.

Forty local entrepreneurs volunteered their time in a series of forums held at local high schools during National Entrepreneurship Week.

The entrepreneurs shared their experiences in starting and running successful businesses in the county, and about 20 different teams entered the competition. Two winning teams were selected and each given a \$5,000 business fund to help start their businesses.

Perhaps the greatest measure of support is in the large list of advisers and judges of both the high school and college competitions — all local businesspeople who took time out of their busy schedule to volunteer their time, knowledge and guidance to competitors.

This year's Economic Fuel judges were Patrick Cleary, president of Lost Coast Communications; Bruce Hamilton, owner of Wildwood manufacturing; Kristin Johnson, director of the Northern California SBDC Lead Center; Charlie Jordan, president of Kinetic Koffee; Pam Olson, CEO and co-owner of Humboldt Internet; and Tom Tellez, owner of Wallace and Hinz.

The collective effort by so many who support the Economic Fuel competition's mission, which states its goal as creating "a climate of opportunity that encourages local college students and recent graduates to apply their education and talents in new business ventures in Humboldt County," is not lost on the competitors.

"We have been totally blown away by the resources this community offers to businesses trying to get started," April Armstrong said after learning she was a finalist last month.

Her business Paihama just became \$10,000 richer Thursday night thanks to Economic Fuel.