

**Spreading the Spirit of Entrepreneurship to Future Leaders  
By Vivian Dunlap, The Eureka Reporter  
5/3/08**

Thanks to the generosity of local entrepreneurs and the collaborative effort of Economic Fuel and the Humboldt County Office of Education's Rising Stars Foundation, Humboldt County is the proud home to two new young entrepreneurs and their innovative businesses.

Fortuna High School student James Roper and Ferndale High's Tyson Boynton's business called Entrance Art and Arcata High student Maria Tonn's business Ecoastal Wear were selected as winners for the first Young Entrepreneurs Business Challenge.

The two winning teams were awarded a \$5,000 start-up fund deposited at the North Coast Small Business Development Center, where the young proprietors will receive 10 hours of free consultation and be able to use the funding to purchase supplies and equipment for their businesses.

The teams had to draft business plans, perform "elevator pitches" and respond to tough questions from a five-member panel of judges as part of the competition.

For him, Roper said drafting a comprehensive business plan was a challenge.

"The business plan was the hardest thing I've ever done before because it was a lot of work, research, typing and re-typing," he said.

Roper and his partner Boynton met through the Humboldt Regional Occupational Program's cabinetry class and had first entered the contest as competitors.

"In the beginning we were competing against each other," he said. "But then we realized both of our (ideas) weren't going to win, so we combined them and went with something that was viable and real."

In fact, the idea was so viable that it is already up and running, and the duo made and sold their first doorway already.

"We make custom entryways, fancy doors," Roper said.

A true businessman already, he added, "There is a vast difference in quality in ours and pre-manufactured doors you buy in stores."

The community effort that went into the Young Entrepreneur's Business Challenge was in keeping with the spirit of the Economic Fuel challenge, where dozens of local business leaders lined up to volunteer their time.

Forty local entrepreneurs took part in forums held at eight local high schools during National Entrepreneurship Week in February, where distinguished alumni had the opportunity to discuss the details and strategies of starting and

running a business and answer questions from their younger, budding and future entrepreneurs.

Roper said the outpouring of help was instrumental in his success — especially from his wood shop teacher Michael Baggott.

“We got a lot of help from a lot of people and advisers,” he said. “Michael Baggott helped us out tremendously and we couldn’t have done it without him.”

Economic Fuel Coordinator Kathy Miller echoed the sentiment.

“Michael worked with the boys from Entrance Art to write their business plan and has been to every event to support them,” she said.

Roper, who graduates this year, said he plans to take all of the knowledge, experience and guidance he and Boynton have received to take their business to the next level and beyond.

“The whole experience has been very fulfilling,” he said. “I feel like I’m actually doing something with my life now, like I have a direction.”