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Junior Achievement program begins at CMS

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CHARLESTON — Brianne Hayes got three answers Wednesday when she asked two dozen eighth-graders if they knew what kind of work they want to do.

One said a cook, another a doctor and the third a lawyer, but none of the rest raised a hand or replied.

"Everybody else is going to be homeless?" Hayes asked. "We've got three ambitious kids and the rest of you are just confused."

What Hayes, an Eastern Illinois University student planning to be a business teacher, and local businessman Bob Kincade were trying to do Wednesday was to get the students thinking about their future careers. They were the first presenters for the newly created Junior Achievement program that will work with eighth-grade students at Charleston Middle School.

CMS student Kendra Callison said she enjoyed the program and the message hit home with her, noting that she'll be in high school a year from now and will need to start thinking about what kind of job she wants.

"I guess I never thought about it before," she said. "It would probably be a good idea."

The Junior Achievement program will take place each Wednesday at CMS in the Career and Applied Technology classes that Karen Garrett teaches. The EIU Center for Entrepreneurship helped develop the program.

"It's a nice fit to expand on the career component of this class," Garrett said Wednesday. "It lets them see and hear about real-life jobs."

Kincade, owner of the What's Cookin' restaurant in Charleston, covered material on immigrants and how they had a "tough time" leaving their home countries, often getting low-paying jobs and facing discrimination when they arrived in the United States. He said he agreed to volunteer for the Junior Achievement program to help show students the history of business.

"It's important that students know how business impacts their lives everyday," Kincade said.

Jeanne Dau, director of Business Solutions Center at the EIU Center for Entrepreneurship, said the center developed the idea for the program from a strategic plan study it conducted two years ago. Research in an eight-county area found that people here are "risk adverse" and aren't willing to become entrepreneurs, she said.

Namely, the study showed that nearly half of people questioned said they'd be afraid of failure if they tried to have their own business, which is twice the national average, and many perceive that entrepreneurs have less status than managers of larger companies, she said.

"Basically, it's not cool to be an entrepreneur in this area," Dau said.

The study's results were presented to a cross section of the community made up of economic development professionals, school personnel, business people and others, and one of the resulting ideas was to have a program that teaches students about entrepreneurship earlier on, she explained.

Dau said the program still needs volunteers to work with the students and donations to help pay for the Junior Achievement materials presenters use in the program. Anyone wanting more information can call the EIU center at 581-2913.

The Lumpkin Family Foundation of Mattoon donated funds to help start the Junior Achievement program. Other presenters Wednesday at CMS were Tim Spitz of First Mid-Illinois Bank & Trust and Jon Kaye, an area businessman.

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Published on Wednesday, September 10, 2008 10:08 PM CDT
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