

U-M camp trains young capitalists

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FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

August 2, 2004

Marcus Ellington owns a lawn-mowing business. The 15-year-old student at Detroit's Western International High School and his partner, a neighbor, have two mowers they use to cut grass for \$15 a pop for 11 clients in their neighborhood. Over the weekend, Ellington's expectations grew. Before stepping one foot into Sam Wyly Hall at the University of Michigan Business School on Saturday to take part in Camp Enterprise for aspiring young entrepreneurs, Ellington knew he wanted to expand his business. After stepping out Sunday, he knew how. Ellington and more than 40 other high school students, mostly from Detroit, learned the basics of starting a business. In groups, the students came up with ideas and assembled business plans that included compiling a balance sheet and proposing a marketing plan. The camp is organized by New Detroit Inc., a nonprofit coalition of groups including Black Family Development Inc. and Inner City Sub Center, which selected 11th- and 12th-graders who have taken economics or marketing classes, students like Ellington who have already started their own businesses and students who have ideas about new businesses. "There are a lot of young people who have the ingredients to be an entrepreneur," said David Gamlin, director of youth entrepreneurship at New Detroit.

"They have guts. They have street smarts. They have tenacity." In high school, he said, it's important to spot those traits and expose young people to information such as how to assemble a business plan and market an idea. Many students also gained their first glimpse at college life as they stayed at Stockwell Hall for two nights and stayed up late Saturday night to work on their projects. For 16-year-old Alexander Settles, who wants to run his own company one day, the camp was a glimpse of what's ahead. "It's actually like I'm owning my own company now," said Settles, a student at Detroit's Cass Technical High School, whose group conceived an after-school day-care facility -- named W.A.L.K.: Working Adults Leading Kids to Success -- which would offer tutoring and entertainment for children. Settles' group and six others faced a panel of judges, including U-M officials and Detroit business leaders, to pitch their business plan.

One group of students envisioned a rapid-rail system that would crisscross Detroit and its outskirts to give commuters an alternative to high gasoline prices and bus transportation. Another group thought up a firm to recruit businesses to Detroit to help fill vacant land and attract more homebuyers and visitors. And another, which won the first-place nod from the judges, pitched a plan for a health club that, in addition to a gym, would hold cooking and motivational classes. Estimating revenue and coming up with a marketing plan for the gym expanded Jenni Lewis' outlook for the future. The 16-year-old Cass Tech student had planned to study communications in college. Now she's thinking about starting her own business.

"I can make my own money. I can make my own hours. I'm my own boss," she said. A tour Friday of the U-M campus also had Lewis thinking of becoming a Wolverine. While Lewis mulls over her future, Ellington knows he and his partner have some work ahead of them. Aside from buying a riding lawn mower so they can cut faster, Ellington wants to make a few hires. "Now," he said. "I can see other people getting involved."

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