

For Immediate Release

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Students Pitch Business Ideas at 8th Annual Sumter's Future Entrepreneurs Competition

Bushnell, Florida – The entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in Sumter County as was evident at the “Shark Tank” style event that took place on Thursday, February 23, 2023, at The Warfield Auditorium in Wildwood. Nearly 80 students began the competition last September as applications were submitted online for startup business plan ideas to compete for cash prizes in the Sumter's Future Entrepreneurs event! All three Sumter County High Schools were represented in this eighth annual event: South Sumter High School; The Villages Charter High School; and Wildwood Middle High School. The business plans first went through a round of rigorous online judging. The top two projects from each school were then invited to pitch their concepts at a live event for cash awards.

The top two finalists from each school were then mentored by volunteers from *Mid-Florida SCORE* in preparation for their live presentations. *Mid-Florida Score* mentors included Daniel Lawson, Kerry Gribosky, David McCormick, Fred Streicher, and Byron Zuidema.

In a “Shark-Tank” style setting, the top finalists made their pitches demonstrating their entrepreneurial potential. The concepts were judged for creativity, innovation, market potential, competitive landscape, product clarity, and operational sustainability. Bringing many years of business experience to the judges' table, the three individuals who volunteered their time and expertise were most impressed! The judges for the event were: Brenda Chrisman, of CareerSource Central Florida; Randy “RM” Thompson, of AgeWave Solutions, Inc; and Suzzette Herman, of the Citizen's First Bank.

The culmination of the evening was the presentation of awards. Each school earned a 1st place (\$1000) and a 2nd place (\$500) award. Award sponsors included: Citizens First Bank; CareerSource Central Florida; AgeWave Solutions, Inc; Suncoast Credit Union; The Sumter County Sheriff's Office; RoMac Building Supply; T& D Pool Construction; SCORE Mid-Florida; City of Wildwood; Sumter Chamber of Commerce; and Flutterby Field Rentals and Design.

First Place Finalists were: South Sumter High School- Emily Burkes – *The Old Heritage Company*; The Villages Charter High School- Peyton Ressler – *What's Up In A Cup?*; Wildwood Middle High School- Kaytlin Kenny and Lyvia Oliveira (team) – *Wallets for Women (WFW)*. Each of these finalists receives a \$1,000.00 cash prize from the award sponsors to further their entrepreneurship idea.

Second Place Finalists were: South Sumter High- Samiul Kader - *Recyclizer*; The Villages Charter High- Isaac Goff – *Exertec*; Wildwood Middle High- Vanessa Castillo and Delvin Miller – *D & V*. All second place finalists receive \$500.00 from the award sponsors to further their entrepreneurship idea.

The third through fifth place finalists of the online competition from each school displayed posters outlining their business ideas and will receive \$200 to further their Entrepreneurship plans for next year's competition. **The Display Finalists were:** from South Sumter High School – Jozlin Bell, Cayle Pitts and Tara Morrison (team), and Savannah Stephens and Sadie Van Hooijdonk (team); from The Villages Charter High School – Mallorie Simpson and Gracin Pulley (team), Jonah Terry, and Blake Wise and from Wildwood Middle High School- Audrey Alaniz and Emily Clayton.

Sumter School Superintendent Rick Shirley was very impressed by the student entrepreneurs. He commented, “This year's entrepreneurial contest demonstrated the wide variety of interests our students have, and the wealth of creative business opportunities available if you have the desire, organizational skills, work ethic and a good imagination. Congratulations to our participants as they were all winners at some level. Also our judges, sponsors and planning committee members outdid themselves this year and our sincere thanks for their help!”

Sumter businesses, agencies, and individuals generously supported this endeavor. In addition to prize sponsors, the following agencies sponsored the event: *The City of Wildwood* donated the use of The Warfield Auditorium for the event; *Suncoast Credit Union* sponsored meal costs for the finalists in addition to the display finalists prizes; *Flutterby Field* supplied the decorations for the evening, *Tangent Media* also supplied graphic upgrades for the competition. Sumter County schools is proud to partner with the **Sumter County Chamber of Commerce**, and **CareerSource Central Florida** to host this event.

Sumter School District wishes to thank all those involved in making this another successful event as we press toward the goal of
Preparing the Next Generation Today!