

For Immediate Release

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Students Pitch Business Ideas at 7th 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, April 21, at the Wildwood Community Center. Nearly 60 applications were submitted as startup business ideas to compete for cash prizes in the Sumter's Future Entrepreneurs event! All three Sumter County High Schools were represented in this seventh 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 Marcia Bloom, Debee Goller, 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 Reeder, of AgeWave Solutions, Inc; Beth Hunt, of the Sumter County Sheriff's Office.

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; United Way of Lake and Sumter; CareerSource Central Florida; Sumter Chamber of Commerce; AgeWave Solutions, Inc; Suncoast Credit Union; The Sumter County Sheriff's Office; Commissioner Craig Estep; RoMac Building Supply; T& D Pool Construction; Mike Scott Plumbing; SCORE Mid-Florida; City of Wildwood; and Flutterby Field Rentals and Design.

First Place Finalists were: South Sumter High School- Raelyn Simmons – *Rae's of Sunshine*; The Villages Charter High School- Erica Wyatt - *Infused*; Wildwood Middle High School- AmandaLesly Miranda and Kathryn Olsen (team) - *Color Your Dreams Art Studio*. 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- Adam Newhouse – *Bi*; The Villages Charter High- Alessandra Dunn – *GLEE*; Wildwood Middle High- Zechariah Poyser – *Certified Sports Gear*. All second place finalists receives \$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 - Emelly Corcho; Mariah Derby-Wine; Allison Gill; and Savannah Stephens and Sadie Van Hooijdonk (team); and from Wildwood Middle High School- Leirin Byrd and Raquel Rowland (team); Brandon Henderson; Aryonna McCoy and Ariana Zarazua-Benitez (team); Dylan McKinley; and Ty'asia Pridgeon.

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 the endeavor. In addition to prize sponsors, the following agencies sponsored the event: *The City of Wildwood* donated the use of the Community Center 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, United Way of Lake and Sumter, 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!