

Falls students tell a tale of retail

By PAUL WESTMOORE

NEWS NIAGARA BUREAU

NIAGARA FALLS — They haven't even graduated yet, but already about two dozen Niagara Falls High School students are cashing in on their education.

The students, participants in the school's Entrepreneurial Program, have formed their own businesses as a course requirement, and many of those varied enterprises are prospering.

The program is designed to have students learn hands-on how to start up and run a small business, said Joseph Bellonte, a teacher on special assignment. Derek Zimmerman teaches the course.

Bellonte said the businesses have been so successful that representatives from seven of them traveled to Erie Community College recently to show Buffalo public school students how they came up with ideas to start businesses, drew up business plans, organized operations and began selling products. The students are even producing television ads to promote their products on the school's in-house channel, doing PowerPoint presentations about their businesses and all have cleverly designed business cards.

Bellonte said Cookie Monster Inc. and Icey White T-Shirts are two of the businesses making good money.

Cookie Monster's four owners bake fresh peanut butter, chocolate chip and macadamia nut cookies during the school day and sell them at a concession stand near the gym — along with small cartons of milk — to students who stay after school for sports and other activities.

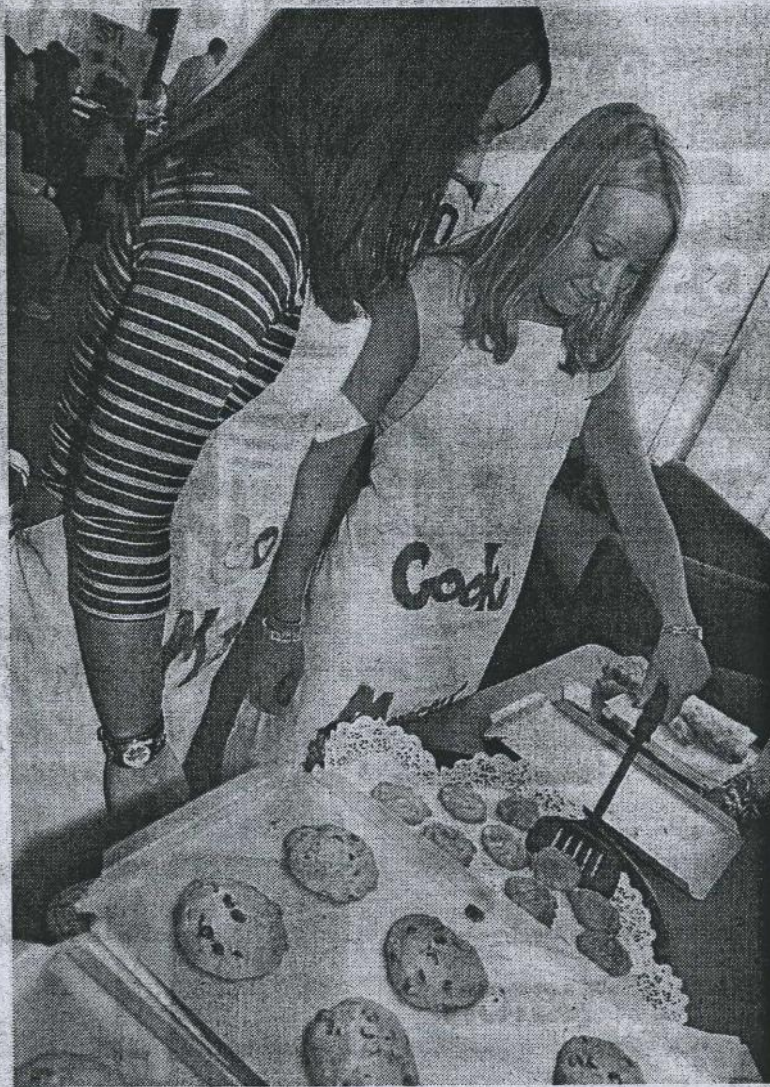
"We sell them for 50 cents a cookie," said partner Julie Girardo. "We do a lot of business."

Lauren Jeckovich said the group thought of the idea "because we like cookies. So we thought other people would."

Angelina Fernandez and Josh Eagan said the business is "real profitable." Fernandez said they were fortunate to have free use of a portable oven from a cookie company to use.

"We have to return it at the end of the year," she said.

Icey White T-Shirts is cashing



Ronald J. Collieran/Buffalo News

Niagara Falls High School students Julie Girardo, left, and Angeline Fernandez are making cookies — and money — as part of a program they shared recently at Erie Community College.

in by selling high-quality, plain white T-shirts which are popular and fashionable with students.

Idea man Franchot Wallace said, "It came to me on the spur of the moment. Our teacher asked us to come up with an idea for a business and I said white T-shirts because a lot of people wear them."

Wallace said the business got off the ground when he and his partners — Felton Harris, Leonardo Rios and Corey Campbell — got a New York City company to provide them "with good quality T-shirts (at wholesale prices). You can put them in the washing machine and they don't shrink too much or stretch out too much. The material is thicker than normal."

Rios, a company sales representative and advertiser, said he peddles the shirts while he works in the school store, The Spot. He also handles marketing by starting word-of-mouth advertising and handing out company business cards.

Bellonte said the students charge about \$4 a shirt while the same product would cost about \$6 at a retail outlet.

"We found something people want. We're the target market ourselves. We know what we like and what's in style. We knew it would sell so we pursued it to make money. That's what business is about," Rios said.

The partners plan to split up the profits in June.

"That's the hook," Bellonte said. "Our students not only learn to own and operate their own businesses, but actually get to keep money they make. It's the incentive that makes them work hard and turns them on to the world of work."

Of all student businesses, the most unusual may be MoJo Tags. Joe Parmer not only is the sole owner, but is the work force, manufacturing his own products. One is an attractive and colorful MoJo necklace that carries an attachment that students can hook on to the school identification tags they are required to wear. His products are made out of T-shirts and other cut up cloth.

"I was just working in my room one day and came up with the idea," Parmer said. "I started making them and some kids saw it and liked it and said I should make more." So he started up his business. He said he cuts up cloth and weaves the pieces together in a way to come up with colorful combinations.

Jacob Neubauer, a tenth-grader, opted to sell personalized wristwatches "because everyone uses them." He said he started WOVO Watches after finding a company that will make batches of 25 custom-made watches and sell them wholesale.

In his first two orders this year Neubauer said he had his school's letters — NFHS — inscribed on the face of each watch and already has sold out his product at \$19.99 each.

Other student businesses include Kimberly Tiede and Latoya Covington's "Unique Calendars," producing custom calendars made to order; Peter Novak, Joe Warner and Nick Ezak's "Wolverine Wear," a business that sells Mitchell & Ness clothing, sport shirts and sports pendants; Leonard Wizner and Charlie LoTempio's Serlich Trades International which sells Nike fashions such as sneakers, hoodie sweat shirts, polo shirts with NFHS sewn onto them, tote bags and even \$60 sandals, which they sell for \$32.

e-mail: pwestmoore@buffnews.com