

# Kids minor in business admin with schoolhouse movies and store

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NIAGARA FALLS — While their schoolmates play outside on Friday afternoons, 10 pupils from Gerakline J. Mann Elementary School are fully engaged in the entertainment business and making money.

The fourth- and fifth-graders spend their spare time running a private business inside the school, operating a movie theater in the Mann auditorium and a retail store and snack bar where candy, toys and school supplies can be purchased at bargain prices.

They show movies at 3:30 most Friday afternoons, charging \$1 for pupils and \$1.50 for adults. More than 150 pupils attended the recent showing of the Disney movie "Finding Nemo." More than 350 packed the auditorium when "The Lion King 1½" was shown shortly after opening for business in late January.

Teaching assistant Michael Kurilovitch, who moderates the program called "The Back 2 Business Club," said the pupils get paid \$5 per week and have banked about \$2,000 since they started their business.

When school ends in June, he said, the corporation members will split the profits, using a portion of the money to buy something for the school.

Kurilovitch, who is also a correspondent for The Buffalo News, said the pupils went into business as part of the city school district's Entrepreneurial Business Program, which encourages young people to start up private businesses at school.

"It teaches them the things they need to do to run a business," he said.

The idea for a movie and store operation came up during a brainstorming session Kurilovitch had early this year with the entertainment moguls-in-training.

"They wanted to do something involving entertainment, and I told them about the after-school movies we used to have when I went to 39th Street School. I told them they were well attended and very popular. When they heard

took off from there," Kurilovitch said.

The pupils secured a \$350 loan from the district to get a copyright license to show movies produced by Disney, MGM, Tri-Star and several other companies.

School Principal Mary Kerins said the pupils repaid their loan from the profits they made from the first movie showing and snack bar sales.

Nick Mayes, 10, one of the 10 pupils running the business, said he and his partners have been able to turn a profit in part because Kurilovitch helped them find which items to sell that would be profitable. Besides candy, popcorn, drinks and other snack items, he said the business also purchased school supplies such as pens, pencils and erasers and some inexpensive toys.

"We sell animal putty for \$1," Nick said of one hit sales item. "You can mold it in your hands. It's very jellylike. We sell a lot of it. It's something kids like to fool around with."

The partners found they all have to work hard to make the business work.

During "Finding Nemo," Nick was in charge of ticket sales, while another partner, Francesca Catanese, 10, and Mike LeGault, 9, ran the store. Sara Doll, Samantha Stoneham, Lindsay Merino, Molly Mackenzie and Emily York operated two snack bars, one specializing in popcorn. They are extensions of the school store.

In the meantime, Kristen Kirker and Amber Gurman were inside the theater attaching garbage bags to the end seats of each aisle — to encourage customer tidiness — and serving as ushers.

Prior to the movie, Kurilovitch, operating the projector, played advertisement videos the 10 partners made — and starred in — to promote their store and snack bar operations. Amber backs up "Mr. K" on the projector when needed.

One ad started off with the words: "Now a Word from Our Sponsor" on the screen. It featured several pupils from the business walking through the school's hallways talking about the products they sell at their store and the great prices they of-

saying, "We have the coolest student store in the city. See you there."

All 10 pupils said they've had a lot of fun running the business and have learned a lot.

"The most important lesson we learned is that you have to invest the money you make in the business," Nick said. "You can't just go out and spend it. You need it to get new movies and stuff for the school store. If you take away the profits, there'll be no money to get the things you need to keep the business going."

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