

Young entrepreneurs get state grant

It isn't just business as usual in Ouzinkie

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Ouzinkie High School students didn't settle for just learning about how to start a business, they decided to start one for themselves. And they got a \$3,100 state grant to undertake a feasibility study of their proposal.

The students also started a snack stand and earned \$2,400 in that enter-

prise, which will be part of the seed money for their new business — the marketing of botanical products from their island home, such as mosses, pine cones and berries.

They have even formed a corporation for the business, called Alaska Foraging Co., and they joined a cooperative in Michigan for marketing.

Despite the tiny size of the school,

which is K-12 and has a total of 42 students taught by five people, the students are taking their new project very seriously.

The teacher behind it is Ron Gibbs, who teaches at the school with his wife Patricia. Patricia Gibbs is a principal half the time and a teacher the other half.

Gibbs said his concern was that business classes in the past had focused

on training for the students that they would never use. The goal of this project, the Entrepreneurship class, was to "create training to create new jobs." The idea was to recirculate dollars within the community as well as bring new money in.

The students, who started this project two years ago, first undertook an

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economic analysis of Ouzinkie and did a community profile to find out what sorts of businesses might work.

The analysis looked at the location, climate, population, government, economy, transportation, facilities, communications, education, recreation and natural resources of Ouzinkie.

A sample from one area, communications, shows how detailed their work was: "There are 42 C.B. radios operating in Ouzinkie and all the boats from the village have these radios. All of these monitor channel 11. Eight villagers and all the boats have V.H.F.'s. They monitor channel six or scan all channels. There are four single sideband radios in town: the one owned by the Ouzinkie Native Corp. is located in the store and monitors channel 2450, and the Public Health Service radio located in the mission, but is currently not in service, stands by on channel 3801 when in use. . ."

After the study was completed, the students settled on three businesses they thought could work in tiny Ouzinkie: a garbage service, a restaurant and the export of local botanicals.

Working with the school to help the students develop formal business plans were Ouzinkie Mayor Zack Chichenoff, attorney Charles Winegarden and accountant Cathy Stevens.

The idea for the garbage service was dropped first because although the students' work showed it could be

financially successful, they were unable because of their age to obtain insurance.

So they decided next on the restaurant. That led to a snack stand to raise capital. At the end of the year last year they had saved \$2,400 from their snack sales. Once again, however, insurance was the problem in starting the business.

"So they decided to go into the export business," Gibbs said. They took their idea very seriously and communicated with a number of state officials about their plans.

The officials were so impressed that a delegation of students was flown to Juneau to make a presentation to a state task force on entrepreneurship. That was in April. Within a few months, the students were able to convince state officials to give the students, through with the City Council, a \$3,100 state grant to do a feasibility study of their export business.

The only state requirement was that a training manual be developed.

Gibbs said he sees much that other schools could use in the approach the Ouzinkie students have taken. And he said one of the most important factors in their success to date has been the involvement of many people in state government and in Ouzinkie.

"This kind of program cannot be teacher dependent. It's a matter of getting ownership into the community," he said.