

TEN9EIGHT

SHOOT FOR THE MOON

a 50 EGGS film

**IN AMERICA, A KID DROPS OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL EVERY 9 SECONDS...
IMAGINE IF THEY DIDN'T.**

This is the compelling question behind award-winning filmmaker Mary Mazzio's newest project **Ten9Eight**, a thought provoking film which tells the inspirational stories of several inner city teens (of differing race, religion, and ethnicity) from Harlem to Compton and all points in between, as they compete in an annual business plan competition run by the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE).

The film includes students such as:

Rodney Walker, age 19, Founder of Forever Life Music and Video Productions. Rodney was put into the foster care system at the age of 5 and ended up homeless on the streets of Chicago. Almost becoming a statistic like many of his brothers, Rodney was able to chart a new future – and is now studying business as a freshman at Morehouse College.

Amanda Loyola, age 16, Founder of Eco-Dog Biscuits. Amanda's father escaped from the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, finding a job at Burger King in Brooklyn, New York. He inspired his daughter, Amanda, to think that anything might be possible in America. Amanda started her business, a vegetarian dog treat company, after her dog, Princess, died from cancer.

Rodney and Amanda are but two of several remarkably resilient kids featured in this film, all of whom are facing the most challenging of circumstances in the inner city - making their achievements all the more remarkable.

The final competition in New York City convenes 35 young entrepreneurs chosen from over 24,000 students from across the country, winnowed down thru a series of city and statewide business plan competitions held throughout the year. The winner receives \$10,000 to launch his or her business – but more importantly, these finalists have the opportunity to interact with high profile entrepreneurs, including the likes of Arthur Blank (founder, Home Depot and owner of the Atlanta Falcons); Tom Scott (co-founder, Nantucket Nectars); Ralph Schlosstein (co-founder, BlackRock); Wyc Grousbeck (owner of the Celtics); and Kay Koplovitz (founder of USA Network). Although there can be only one winner, each student is empowered with the promise of a future they never thought possible.

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ABOUT MARY MAZZIO

Mary Mazzio, an award-winning director, Olympian, and former law firm partner, is Founder and CEO of 50 Eggs, an independent film production company. Mary wrote, directed and produced the highly-acclaimed award-winning films, Lemonade Stories, Apple Pie and A Hero for Daisy and recently completed we are BlackRock. Her most recent project is Ten9Eight, which tells the stories of several kids from low-income communities who discovered the power of entrepreneurship.

Mary's interest in the subject of entrepreneurship was piqued after she made Lemonade Stories, an award-winning film about extraordinary entrepreneurs and their mothers featuring Richard Branson, Arthur Blank and Kay Koplovitz among others. Mary's first film, A Hero for Daisy tells the story of Title IX pioneer and two-time Olympian Chris Ernst, who galvanized her rowing team to storm the Yale athletic director's office in 1976, protesting the lack of athletic facilities for women. The film was hailed by The New York Times as a "landmark film," was invited to screen at the Smithsonian, and is in thousands of classrooms across the country. This project was followed shortly by Apple Pie, an intimate film about star athletes and their moms. It serves as a tribute to the often-invisible strength, courage and power of mothers, a resounding theme in Mary's projects.

Mazzio, an Olympic athlete (1992-Rowing), is a graduate of Mount Holyoke College and Georgetown Law School. A recipient of several awards including the Women's Sports Foundation Journalism Award, a Gracie Award, a Myra Sadker Gender Equity Curriculum Award, a Henry Luce Foundation Fellowship (to Korea); the Mary Lyon Award (from Mount Holyoke College); and a Rotary Foundation Graduate Fellowship (to France), Mary, formerly a partner with the law firm of Brown Rudnick in Boston, MA, has served on a number of Boards of Directors including Shackleton Schools (which serve high school students in danger of failing in traditional high schools); Sojourner House (a homeless shelter); The Greater Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras, The Head of the Charles Regatta, The National Rowing Foundation, and World T.E.A.M Sports (supporting disabled athletes). She has also served on the Advisory Board for The Rhode Island International Film Festival as well as serving as a judge for the Sports Emmys. The Schlesinger Library at Harvard University has requested all of Mazzio's papers for its collection.

Mazzio has also been the keynote speaker at numerous events and ceremonies (both corporate and educational) across the nation, including: the State of Nebraska Convention on Economic Development; the NCAA Title IX Convention; The National Coalition of Girls' Schools

Convention; the Women's Sports Foundation Convention; the National Association of Collegiate Women's Athletic Administrators' Convention; and USA Hockey's Patty Kazmaier Awards (celebrating the best collegiate hockey player in the country) as well as hundreds of events at universities and high schools across the country. She is a frequent guest on NECN, speaking on issues of the day. Mary is willing to disclose her height and true hair color - but refuses to disclose her golf handicap, particularly after her performance at the Drew Bledsoe Celebrity Golf Tournament where she participated as a celebrity (who nobody knew). She was, however, heckled by real celebrities – NFL great Lynn Swann and producer Bobby Farrelly (There's Something About Mary) for having brand new golf shoes. She heckled back.

Her work has been supported by New Balance, Welch's, BlackRock, Staples, CVS, Babson College, Life Is Good, Nike, Clif Bar, The John Templeton Foundation, the Kauffman Foundation, among others. Mary and her work have been featured in The New York Times, USA Today, Entertainment Weekly, TV Guide, Sports Illustrated, The Los Angeles Times, Business Week, The Boston Globe, The Christian Science Monitor, St. Paul Pioneer Press, Forbes.com, MSNMoney.com, CNN Sunday Morning, CNN Headline News, NPR (On Point, The Connection, It's Only A Game), Oxygen, ESPN's Sports Center, Baseball Tonight, and Cold Pizza.

Mazzio resides in Massachusetts with her husband, Jay Manson, and two children.

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ABOUT 50 EGGS FILMS

Mary Mazzio, an award-winning director, Olympian, and former law firm partner, is Founder and CEO of 50 Eggs, LLC, an independent film production company. Mary wrote, directed and produced the highly acclaimed award-winning films, *Lemonade Stories*, *Apple Pie* and *A Hero for Daisy* and recently completed *we are BlackRock*. *A Hero for Daisy* was hailed by *The New York Times* as a “landmark film” and “fantastic” by *Sports Illustrated*; “remarkable” by NPR; aired nationwide on ESPN, Oxygen, WGBH, and WTSN-Canada; was invited to screen at the Smithsonian, and is in thousands of classrooms across the country. *Apple Pie* aired nationwide on ESPN to critical acclaim, and was called “illuminating – told with deftness and emotion... priceless” by *The New York Times*; “heartwarming” by *Los Angeles Times*; “fantastic”- NPR, and “excellent: - CNN. *Lemonade Stories*, which aired nationwide on CNNfn (and which aired nationwide in Latin America, the UK, Israel, the Middle East, New Zealand, and Hong Kong in 2008), was the subject of cover stories by *USA Today* (complete with a trailer and photos on *USA Today’s* splash page), *Forbes.com*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *ABC News.com*, as well as featured on NPR, Bloomberg Radio, and in *Fast Company*.

ABOUT RICHARD KLUG DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Richard Klug is an award-winning cinematographer. In addition to his work for 50 Eggs Films (*Lemonade Stories*, *we are BlackRock*, and *Ten9Eight*), Richard has shot commercials for Gillette, ESPN, Hummer, McDonald's, Hewlett-Packard, Volkswagen, and Ocean Spray. His work has won Gold awards at the One Show, Communication Arts, the Telly Awards, the International Film & TV Festival of New York, Boston's Hatch Awards, Hugo, Cindy and Cine Golden Eagle festivals, as well as Minneapolis' The Show. Richard lives in Wellesley, Massachusetts with his wife, Kate. They have two sons, Nate and Sam.

ABOUT RICHARD SCHULTZ STILL PHOTOGRAPHER

Richard Schultz has been shooting professionally for almost 20 years and has worked on various projects all over the world for National Geographic, Time, Sports Illustrated, Vanity Fair, Fortune, as well as for numerous corporate and advertising clients. He is a recipient of a World Press Photo Award as well as winning numerous Addy and Communication Arts awards. He currently lives in Barrington, Rhode Island with his wife and two beautiful boys. www.rschultz.com

ABOUT PAUL GATTUSO

EDITOR

Paul has been editing since his Dad threatened he'd have to join the family business if he didn't get a job soon. So he fled New Jersey for Emerson College, where he found a love for crafting a story from raw footage and big ideas. Paul began his career working for various post houses in Boston and NYC, editing commercials, music videos and cable shows. He opened Paul's Place Editorial in 1993, and quickly gained a reputation for being an expert craftsman by working on national and local advertising campaigns, documentaries and new media projects with clients such as Volkswagen, Nikon and Comcast. His work has earned Paul Hatch Awards, Telly Awards as well as many sleepless nights. www.paulsplaceedit.com.

ABOUT ALEX LASARENKO

COMPOSER

Alex Lasarenko, a classically trained pianist who began playing at the age of three, is a New York-based film scorer and sound remixer, who has won critical acclaim for his writing and arranging of original music and vocal remixing. Since founding Tonal Sound in New York City 2002, Alex has collaborated on a wide range of projects with advertisers, network television, motion pictures, record labels and designers, recently remixing hits for Britney Spears, Jordyn Sparks, David Archuleta and R. Kelly. He has scored numerous films starring Stockard Channing, Julia Stiles, Mary Louise Parker and Danny Aiello. Alex has been honored with numerous industry awards for best original music for clients including Audi, Levi's, Nike, Mercedes Benz, National Geographic, HBO, and Volkswagen. Under his hand, Tonal has won awards for its work with HBO, Paramount Studios and The Disney Channel. www.tonalsound.com

ABOUT NFTE

The Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) is an international nonprofit organization that teaches young people from low-income communities to think like entrepreneurs, so they can take control of their futures. Founded in 1987 by Steve Mariotti, a former New York City public school teacher, it originally began as a dropout prevention and

academic performance improvement program for students who were at risk of failing or quitting school. Today, NFTE has grown into a comprehensive business education program in 27 states and 13 countries with more than 230,000 graduates and 1,300 NFTE-certified entrepreneurship teachers. The project itself is funded by the John Templeton Foundation with additional support from the Kauffman Foundation.

ABOUT THE JOHN TEMPLETON FOUNDATION

The mission of the **John Templeton Foundation** is to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discovery in areas engaging life's biggest questions. These questions range from explorations into the laws of nature and the universe to questions on the nature of love, gratitude, forgiveness, and creativity. www.templeton.org

ABOUT THE EWING MARION KAUFFMAN FOUNDATION

The Kauffman Foundation is the largest foundation in America devoted to growing economies and expanding human welfare by helping more entrepreneurs start and grow businesses and by exploring more effective ways to move innovations to market. www.kauffman.org

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FEATURED STUDENT BIOGRAPHIES

Tatyana Blackwell, 17, Just Cheer Uniforms, Capitol Heights, Maryland

"To be a good entrepreneur, it takes you believing in yourself, even if nobody else does."

Tatyana is a bit of a rebel and embodies the adventure and dedication of a true entrepreneur. Tatyana's mother is a police officer in the District of Columbia and is less than pleased when daughter's rebellious streak shows itself. Cheerleading has been Tatyana's passion since she was in the first grade. In 2004, Tatyana and the other members of Suitland High School's cheerleading team weren't impressed by the uniform design proposed by their coach. Tatyana took matters into her own hands – and designed a "flashy, hot" uniform featuring a top hat. Her designs caught the eyes of her competitors at cheerleading championships – and Just Cheer Uniforms was born. Tatyana not only designs and manages the manufacturing of cheerleading outfits and accessories – but she is currently working on a special project with the Washington Redskins Cheerleaders. Tatyana's business plan captured first place at her high school business plan competition and at the Greater Washington D.C. business plan competition in the spring of 2008.

Jessica Cervantes, 18, Popsy Cakes, Miami, Florida

"Get out and talk to different people about your business idea. You have to go after it; you can't just wait for it to come to you."

Ever since her grandmother taught her how to bake, Jessica has loved measuring and tasting different ingredients – and experimenting with fun new flavors. But it was not until Jessica enrolled in an entrepreneurship course at her school that baking and business came together in a brand new recipe for success. For her business plan, Jessica decided to create a new cupcake concept called Popsy Cakes – a cake on an edible stick. The budding baker won first place in her high school's business plan competition, and second place in the South Florida regional competition. Jessica hopes to attend the University of Miami, get an M.B.A, and take Popsy Cakes nationwide. www.popsycakes.com

Gabriel Echoles & Rodney Walker, 18, Forever Life Music & Video Productions, Chicago, Illinois

"How would I describe myself – I am a scholar." – Rodney Walker

Rodney Walker was put into the foster care system at the age of 5, along with his 6 brothers and sisters – and ended up homeless on the streets of Chicago. Rather than following in the footsteps of his brothers (several of whom were in gangs or in jail), Rodney forged a new future for himself by learning how to start a video production business. He stayed in

school, graduating with honors, and recently made the Dean's List at Morehouse College, where he studies business.

Gabe, Rodney's business partner, is also from the South Side of Chicago. Born to a teenage mother, Gabe was primarily raised by his grandmother – a very strong Christian woman. Since the age of five, Gabe has been singing. When Gabe enrolled in an entrepreneurship class during their senior year at A.C.E. Technical Charter High School, his teacher suggested that he pair up with Rodney to combine their interests into a business plan, and Forever Life Music & Video Productions was born. The business, which creates customized videos with originally composed music and songs for special occasions, won first place in the Chicago citywide business plan competition. www.foreverlife2008.com

Macalee Harlis, 18, MAC Shields, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

"Put all you have into it."

Mac, a standout high school football player, credits his father as his greatest influence and the source of his determination to succeed. His father, Macalee Harlis, Sr., had to forgo college to support his mother and siblings, later becoming a custodian for the Ft. Lauderdale School system. He was a strict man, insisting that his son be his own person and think for himself. Mac's business was inspired when it came time to create a business plan for the entrepreneurship class he was taking. Mac looked up at his teacher, who was wearing transition sun glasses. He immediately thought about how difficult it was to play football in certain conditions (with lights flashing or light changing) – and he created *MAC Shields* – football shields painted with photo-chromatic paint that transitions in color according to the UV sunlight concentration in the environment. Mac's current prototype goes leaps and bounds beyond the very primitive black paint most players use to deflect the sun. Mac is continuing his studies at Florida Atlantic University and is currently working on making a prototype for *MAC Shields*. www.Macshields.com

Shan Shan Huang, 19, Charger Station, Boston, Massachusetts

"If you don't take risks, you will never know what you could have done."

Three years ago Shan Shan was a high school student in southern China when her parents made a decision that would change the lives of their family forever: They immigrated to the United States to give their daughters a chance to get a better education and a better life. In China, Shan Shan never had the opportunity to learn about starting a business, so she jumped at the chance to take an entrepreneurship course at Charlestown High School. For her business plan, Shan Shan designed a plan to import Chinese cell phone charger vending machines that she noticed in the airports and hotels in China. Shan Shan took first place in the New England regional business plan competition. She is currently talking to Chinese manufacturers to adapt the cell phone charger devices for the American market. Shan Shan now attends the College of the Holy Cross.

Amanda Loyola, 15, EcoDog Treats LLC, New York, New York

"Starting my own business has taught me that if you want to do something, you should never let anyone tell you you can't."

Amanda's father, Cesar, escaped from the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and came to America. With his limited English, he began working at the local Burger King in Brooklyn but later

started his own business as a chef. Amanda, inspired by her father's entrepreneurial spirit, started a vegetarian dog biscuit business after her dog, Princess, died from cancer. Heartbroken, Amanda began to research the ingredients of pet food. She discovered that red meat, which contains chemicals from cattle feed, was one of the leading causes of cancer in dogs. Amanda created peanut butter-based dog treats which were vegetarian, organic and chemical-free. She notes that the dogs in her neighborhood prefer her EcoDog treats over meat treats. She took first place in the New York Metro regional business plan competition and plans to study economics when she goes to college. www.ecodogtreats.com

William Mack, 16 & Ja'Mal Willis, 17, J&W Sensations, Baltimore, Maryland

"The most important thing that we learned is that sometimes you have to take a risk. But good things can come from it."

The idea for William and Ja'Mal's business grew out of a school science class when they discovered the high number of chemicals in typical body lotions. The boys were inspired to develop a chemical-free lotion and, to their delight, discovered that "the ladies loved our cucumber melon scented lotion." Their business plan took first place in the Baltimore citywide business plan competition. William and Ja'Mal spent part of their summer perfecting their lotion formula as well as the business plan for the national competition. After the high school juniors graduate, they both plan on attending college. William would like to pursue athletics, while Ja'Mal plans to major in business.

Robbie Martin, 17, The Deaf Academy, New Bedford, Massachusetts

"When I was younger, many people thought that I was a failure. I think now I've proved to them that I can be a success."

Robbie, who has been deaf since birth, hasn't let his lack of hearing slow him down. Instead, he was inspired to launch his Deaf Academy after fellow New Bedford High School students began asking for impromptu sign language lessons. During breaks and after school, he taught fellow students to sign. While teaching basic signing skills to children at the Kids College at Bristol Community College, Robbie saw an opportunity to combine his teaching ability and the market for his services when he created his business through his high school's entrepreneurship curriculum. He placed third at the New England regional business plan competition. He currently attends Gallaudet University.

Anné Montague, 17, Inamoratos Dance, Baltimore, Maryland

"Be driven. Don't settle for what might happen - make it happen."

"Having my own business means making my own rules."

Anné does it all. She dances, choreographs, and takes full charge of her dance company, which she started at the age of 10. Anné was raised primarily by her father, Purcell Montague, a truck driver, as her mother suffered from drug addiction. Anné, a focused girl with a big attitude, wants the best for every member of her dance team, whom she considers family. She requires her dancers to go to class and keep their grades up. Anné's business is a non-profit, aimed at getting inner city kids off the street. Her motto? "No shirt, no shoes, no need. We dance." Anné will attend Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University next year, majoring in business. www.inamoratos.com

Alexander Niles, 16, Niles Custom Shop Guitars, Miami, Florida

“Believe in yourself, and you’ll do it. If you think negative, then it’s never going to happen.”

Alex is the son of immigrants – a Hungarian father (and entrepreneur) and a mother from Uruguay. Alex, now 16 and a lifelong musician, builds custom guitars. As Alex says, “Well, Jimi Hendrix made his own guitar, so I thought I would make one too.” Alex also notes that his newest guitar, made of the highest-quality components (which he thinks is superior to Fender and Gibson), is one that his favorite musician, Kurt Cobain, would have played. Alex never dreamed that he could create a business from his passion until he took an entrepreneurship class at Highland Oaks Middle School. When his business plan took first place in the South Florida Regional Business Plan Competition, Alex used his prize money to create a custom guitar. Alex, whose guitar is now endorsed by Alex Fox, a legendary musician, hopes to study music theory at the Juilliard School in New York after graduating from high school. www.nilescustomguitars.com

PAST NFTE ALUMNI

Jasmine Lawrence – Eden Body Works, New Jersey

Jasmine Lawrence, a 17-year-old at the Williamstown High School, is arguably among the most successful teenage entrepreneurs in the country. Jasmine’s business was inspired by a regrettable incident with a hair relaxer that made all of her hair fall out at the age of 11 – and she was determined to create safe organic products for other women. Desperate to make her hair grow back, Jasmine researched and experimented with organic products, and stumbled onto a formula which helped her hair grow back. Word spread throughout her community, landing her a spot on Oprah and a deal with Whole Foods Market (which carries her line of bath salts). She has recently negotiated a deal with Wal-Mart – all before the age of 18.

www.edenbodyworks.com

Howard Stubbs – Howard’s Hot Dogs, New York City

Peter Jennings featured Howard’s story in 1988. Howard, a high school senior from the Bronx, is an entrepreneur with a hot dog stand business (like his mother), and was class president of his high school class. Ironically, it was during college that Howard veered off the path. He came home one day to find his mother in tears. The lights were off. Because she was unable to push her hotdog cart out in the snow for several weeks, she was falling behind in her bills and risked eviction. Howard decided to make some fast money – and he began selling drugs. He was arrested and served 6 years in prison that dramatically changed his life. “Prison is hell on earth,” said Howard. He now says to younger kids: “You want to sell drugs and you want to go down the wrong path? They’ve got something waiting for you on the other side.” It was in prison that Howard began studying the Bible. Howard promised himself that when he got out, he would “follow his feet” down the right path to give his daughter a positive role model. After his release from prison, Howard returned to his hot dog business, which he believes made it possible for him to continue down the right path to success.

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INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Mary tells us about TEN9EIGHT.

It was rewarding to work on a film that deals with race, class and privilege – and to be able to address these subjects in an uplifting and hopeful way, it is so personally meaningful to me. The kids that we chronicle in the film are so remarkable and many of them have demonstrated such extraordinary resilience in their lives. The fact that they have this wonderful will to achieve has been so inspirational, for me as well as for the judges of the business plan competition. I love all of these kids, but Rodney Walker, a young entrepreneur from the South Side of Chicago, stood out as one of the more inspirational journeys of this film. Rodney entered the foster system at the age of 5 – and was homeless for a period of time. To see a charismatic articulate young man overcome such challenging circumstances – frankly, he embodies the American Dream.

This film truly profiles a personal journey for each of these kids. Was the process a journey for you as well? How so?

We went into some of the most challenging neighborhoods around the country as we were making this film. I remember talking with my director of photography, Richard Klug, and discussing if we should be concerned about whether it was safe for us, particularly with expensive equipment – wondering if we should have security or body guards to safeguard the crew and the equipment.

After thinking about what sort of message a body guard might convey, we decided against it – and charged in. And I discovered that all of my pre-conceived notions about the inner city were wrong – we were warmly welcomed into these areas, into their communities and families. I felt no sense of fear and now I feel no hesitation. I think we are all brought up with these stereotypical views of what certain neighborhoods and certain kinds of people are like – particularly in the inner city. That being said, there were certain areas you do not want to go into after dark. You have to be smart. This singular experience helped me break through my own stereotypes and assumptions that I had formed about “bad neighborhoods.”

Going through this incredible process with these kids must have been an amazing experience. Did any experience stand out for you?

Brooklyn! We were planning to film several business plan competitors from all over New York, who were also slam poets, artists, and dancers. The location was a remarkable set of buildings with graffiti art. We pull up at 5am in the morning and start pulling out all of our equipment,

rushing to try to catch the beautiful, early morning light. Suddenly this silver limo, the size of a kitchen, pulls up, just as we are ready to begin shooting our first performance. A very smartly dressed gentleman (with bodyguards) steps out and said: “Yeah, so you’re on my property.”

The crew of 20 – plus about 50 kids – all of a sudden fall silent. I am thinking to myself, “Well – we have our permits – and I hope I don’t lose my breakfast in front of all these people.” Not good.

The gentleman and I had a private conversation – and after some back and forth, fortunately were able to strike a deal so that we could stay there for the morning to film the performances. What an amazing day – these performances were some of the most heartfelt and raw and honest moments– each person articulating through poetry, dance, and rap – about their experiences living in poverty and in the inner city.

Tell us about the young rap artists, EMPIRE.

The last performers were filmed were four young African-American teenagers who rapped sequentially. They were fabulous. After they finished, I asked them – “Hey, do you guys know The Sugar Hill Gang.” For a moment, there was a blank stare – and then big laughs. LeRoy shouted out – “Sugar Hill Gang?” and I shout back: “You know, ‘Hotel, motel, Holiday Inn?’” I was told in no uncertain words that I was old school.

I was laughing so hard – and they pulled me out in front of the camera and became my backup band. There we were, a white 40-year-old hockey mom, with four African-American teens from the Bronx – and I rap (if you can call it rap): “Have you ever gone over a friend’s house to eat and the food just ain’t no good.” And then Sadeek and LeRoy croon “Say what?” And it was one of those moments that I will remember and treasure for the rest of my life. It was so powerful because it was a connection that transcended race and time and age – it was just exhilaration, and pure fun.

What do you think someone watching this film will take away with them?

I would hope that anyone watching this film would take away two things. Number one is that with the right stimulus, anything is possible for any child. Number two - no matter your circumstances, anyone can be an entrepreneur. You don’t have to be book smart, you don’t have to play basketball or hockey, and you don’t have to play the violin. What you do have to do is be able to take risks and be adventurous ... which is really at the heart of being entrepreneurial. And for me that’s really the embodiment of the American Dream.

The judging panel is very impressive. Do you think there was anyone in particular that really impressed them or surprised them?

NFTE had a remarkable set of dedicated judges at all levels of the competition, from the city-wide finals to the state-wide finals. For the nationwide finals in New York City, several famous entrepreneurs joined the judging ranks including Arthur Blank (who co-founded Home Depot and owns the Atlanta Falcons), Wyc Grousbeck (owner of the Celtics), Ralph Schlosstein (co-founder of BlackRock), David Fialkow (founder of General Catalyst), Tom Scott (founder of Nantucket Nectars and PLUM TV); Kay Koplovitz (founder of USA Network), among others.

The judges were so impressed by the presentation skills and innovative ideas that they witnessed

during the competition – and nearly all of them admitted that they wished they had had those skills and confidence at such an early age.

What did the kids take away from participating in this competition?

I think they took away a number of things. How to present to adults, how to look people in the eye and how to be articulate. And they're learning really sophisticated concepts about return on investment. These kids can now go out and form small businesses and take charge of their destiny. They are empowered – and many of them stay in school. What NFTE is doing for these kids by teaching them entrepreneurship skills – they are changing lives and destinies, which is why it is so compelling.

I also think the kids took away two other things. One, people were paying attention to them, and most importantly, what they were doing was important. And two, to be a good entrepreneur, you have to be really prepared, you have to be really articulate and you can never give up. They will all make mistakes – we all make mistakes. We will all have detours but it doesn't mean that opportunity should end.

The reality is all these kids are winners. They were winners because of the adversity that they had to overcome in their lives, the fact that they were trying to achieve, and the fact that they were trying to do something for their future. I do not think that I could have gotten up, at the age of 16, in front of 300 adults that included bankers, and corporate chieftains. Just watching these kids, all of whom overcame obstacles far greater than I ever had to deal with, it made me want to cheer and cry at the same time.

How did you become involved with the project?

I had just finished *Lemonade Stories*, a film about entrepreneurs and their mothers – and I met Steve Mariotti, the founder of NFTE, which teaches kids from low-income communities how to become entrepreneurs. Steve told me he was in tears after seeing *Lemonade Stories* – and told me about his work and how for many inner-city kids, that Shakespeare was irrelevant, that math was irrelevant to their lives. But when they were given the chance to learn how to start a small business – maybe it was buying a set of watches for \$25 and selling them for \$100 – that all of a sudden, math was important, writing was important, presentation skills were important – and the first thing that came to my mind was this: WOW. I have got to do a film about this.