

TEN9EIGHT

SHOOT FOR THE MOON

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.