



E City

Entrepreneurship: connecting, inspiring (&) teaching youth

Board of Directors

D. Kirk Neiswander
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John Zitzner

John Zitzner
Founder & President

P.O. Box 221426
Cleveland, OH 44122

Direct Line: 216•896•1597
FAX 216•292•9101

John.Zitzner@bradleycompany.com
www.ecitycleveland.com

What is E City all about?

E City is about planting seeds to grow healthy communities. It's about teaching 14-18 year olds from low-income communities how to be economically self-sufficient so that they can break out of the tragic cycle of poverty. It's about teaching kids how to run their own businesses and be their own bosses. It's about channeling innate street smarts into business smarts and turning around Cleveland's inner-city neighborhoods – one young entrepreneur at a time.

I'm John Zitzner. I've lived in the Cleveland area for over 25 years. I'm an entrepreneur. I started Bradley Company here in Cleveland as a two-person company in 1983 and it grew to 40 people. I sold the software company in 1998 to Xerox Corporation. I've been blessed. Now it's time to give back.

A way to break the cycle of poverty is to reach young people and teach them academic, business and life skills. Teach youth how to fish instead of giving them a fish. That's what E City stands for. As a partner of the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE), we teach young people how to think like entrepreneurs, and how to be entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs create jobs. That's what is needed here in Cleveland and in other major cities. NFTE has been successfully doing this since 1987 (see www.nfte.com). Using NFTE's award-winning curriculum and Certified Entrepreneurship Teachers, E City delivers a powerful program consisting of interactive classroom learning, excellent guest speakers and role models with proven track records, field trips to bring academic learning to life, and tutoring to help students prepare their own business plan for their own entrepreneurial venture!

Where are the programs?

The first program has been completed. Nine students began the program on June 18, 2002. Eight completed the program and seven attended the final Business Plan Competition. The eighth student could not finish in time but wants to present the plan to our staff. The average attendance throughout the 17 sessions was just over 80%. Classes were held Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9:30 am – 12:30 pm. Often, classes ended closer to 1 pm. Students stayed, were attentive, engaged and actually enjoyed the class. 100% said they would recommend this class to other students and friends, and

100% said this course was BETTER than other courses they have taken in the last 2 terms. Six out of seven indicated that they now see entrepreneurship as “an exciting way to channel my hobbies, skills and interests into a means of making a living.” And, six out of seven said, “Entrepreneurship is the best way I know to make money.” Five of seven indicated, “entrepreneurship is an important way of increasing my self-esteem because it means making money the best way.” Five of seven stated, “My desire to start my own business is far greater than before the course.” Business knowledge average test scores improved by 34% measured prior to the class, and again at the end. Many students have indicated their desire to continue learning more of the curriculum, even if it means taking one Saturday morning a month during the school year to do so.

Students, parents, teachers, guest speakers, Botanical Garden representatives and class visitors are unanimous in their high praise, excitement and satisfaction with the outcome of the first Cleveland program. Our challenge is to continue to replicate these successes with more at-risk youth in our city and inner-ring suburbs. We’ve planted some seeds to grow healthy communities. We need to nurture those seedlings, help them grow, and plant many more seeds.

What's coming up in the fall?

This fall, E City’s Certified Entrepreneurship Teachers will teach four diverse programs. Two are in-school programs for middle-school aged students, and two are alternative programs for older students.

The in-school programs are located at Warrensville Heights Middle School and Alexander Hamilton Middle School. Both programs have the full support of the schools’ principals and teachers.

One alternative program takes place at the Miles Avenue Family YMCA at E 113th. This is an after-school program for about ten 15-18 year olds who have been interviewed and selected by the E City staff. The other program is hosted by YO! Cleveland in the city’s empowerment zone in the St. Clair and E. 105th area. The target population is 17-20 year old students who are not attending any high school.

The diversity of the students, locations and goals of the four programs make the fall exciting and challenging. We will have different experiences and outcomes and will use our gained knowledge to help us formulate our plans for the spring programs and beyond.

Our philosophy is to begin to cure the disease of poverty by attacking the root causes instead of temporarily dealing with symptoms. The problem requires long-range strategic thinking and action and not short-term band-aids. If you share this philosophy, perhaps you will seriously consider helping by providing funds to help build E City’s capacity to affect lives and create a sense of hope and self-reliance for the next generation.