

# THE PLAIN DEALER

**Cleveland Charter school opening with high hopes**

**E Prep is brainchild of entrepreneur**

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**Scott Stephens**

**Plain Dealer Reporter**

The 125 sixth-graders who will make up the first class at the new Entrepreneurship Preparatory School in Cleveland this summer had best start thinking about their postgraduate plans.

"I'm going to shake each student's hand and tell them they're going to college," said the charter school's founder, John Zitzner. "That's what they're going to hear for seven years."

When it comes to goals, Zitzner has a track record of delivering. In 1983, he quit his job and started his own software company, selling the firm in 1998 to Xerox Corp.

A few years later, he brought his skills as an entrepreneur to Cleveland youngsters by establishing E City. The after-school and summer program is designed to improve the academic, business, technological and life skills of young people from low-income families.

The program has been so successful that one participant, Crystal Ramos, a senior at Cleveland's Success Tech, was named the 2004 National Young Entrepreneur of the Year in a major competition.

The new school, which will open Aug. 23, is an outgrowth of that venture. E Prep, which eventually will include grades six-12, will operate year-round.

Students will receive 2,000 annual instructional hours, more than double the Ohio minimum of 920.

The publicly funded, privately run charter school will be sponsored by the Cleveland Municipal School District, giving the district limited oversight power.

The district also plans to sponsor a charter school for at-risk boys proposed by Glenville High School football coach Ted Ginn.

Zitzner, who spoke last week at the City Club of Cleveland, said he toured a dozen East Coast schools to learn how successful charter schools work.

"What I found were high-achieving schools where kids were exceeding achievement tests," he said. "We said, 'We need to bring this here.'"

The first step was recruiting Marshall Emerson III, who was assistant director at the W.E.B. Dubois Academy in Cincinnati -- one of Ohio's top-performing charter schools. Emerson will be E Prep's director, and Zitzner will serve on the board of directors.

Emerson has spent much of the last year training at Building Excellent Schools, a Boston-based nonprofit

group dedicated to replicating successful charter schools across the country.

"You get to see the best practices and you get access to really great schools," he said.

Emerson is one of 16 people chosen from 200 applicants for fellowships designed to prepare prospective school leaders for every aspect of operating a charter school, from writing an application to fund-raising.

The yearlong program pays fellows a \$50,000 stipend and includes more than 90 days of training at the group's Boston office, three dozen visits to successful charter schools, an extended residency in a high-performing charter school and ongoing coaching and support.

By the beginning of the next school year, the 16 fellows will have opened charter schools from New England to Colorado.

Linda Brown, the group's executive director, explained: "One of the mistakes people make is thinking they can start one of these schools by writing their application at midnight or on Sunday after church. It doesn't work that way."

Zitzner said he's excited about the opening of E Prep, which is hiring faculty and has about 70 slots for students still available for next school year. But it's just the first step of a mission to transform urban education here, he said.

"By the time I'm 94 years old like my father, we're going to have 12 of these," he said. "What else am I going to do -- golf?"

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:

sstephens@plaind.com, 216-999-4827