

School store at Cinnaminson provides gifts of many kinds to the school and community

If you need inspiration for upgrading your school store or for starting a school-based enterprise (SBE), you'll want to get acquainted with the student store at Cinnaminson H.S. in New Jersey.

This SBE may well be the quintessential DECA school store, with its ambitious inventory and long-term success. As you read about it, you should also realize that advisor Fae Zuckerman operates a full-service DECA chapter. Of her 60 student members, 19 travelled to ICDC in 2006, most of them with written manuals.

Consider also that the chapter raises all of its conference travel funds in activities other than the store, netting enough to lower the cost of a member's travel to ICDC to a mere \$32. Now let's look at the store.

Fae Zuckerman comes from a retailing background. Thirty-one years ago, when she took over the store at Cinnaminson, they sold mostly school supplies and a few snacks. Fae, however, made her first venture into the unusual by selling Lee jeans that she acquired from her parents' store. Since they were sold at a small profit margin, they became a popular item at the store.

Teaching through the store takes time, declares Fae, but the students gain a basic, indelible understanding of how to run a retail business. They tell her that they are way ahead when they get to college. Fae also reports that taking on responsibility in the store "improves their self-confidence and self-esteem." Students go to shows in New York to buy products for the store, learning to take with them a business card and three references so that vendors will take them seriously. The sophomores work behind the scenes and do inventory.

The juniors run the store. Each junior (second-year student) has an "area of pride," a concept Fae adopted from her days at Strawbridges. The area of pride is that student's responsibility—the product areas and functions they attend to. One such area is seasonal merchandise. She tells an interesting story: The store had several four-foot witches on display one Halloween. The witches did not

sell, and since they do not buy on consignment, they had to try to recoup their losses. Fae assigned the student responsible for seasonal merchandise the task of selling the witches. That student learned a valuable retailing lesson by creating a display in the store window with the witches surrounding a cauldron. Result? The witches sold. Says Fae, "Same product, same clientele, same store . . . the display made the difference."

The store offers much of the merchandise traditional for an SBE, but their extensive inventory in giftware has netted them an additional enthusiastic clientele with teachers and community members. As a nonprofit educational venture, they can sell brand names at a discount—a great draw for customers. Two years ago, they added Lennox to their product line, and now several brides have registered at the store.

The importance of an audit, by the way, is undeniable. Here is Fae's approach to this necessity: "Store funds are deposited in an account at our Central Administration Offices. Most student store funds are held at the high school in the student activities account. I prefer that they are held at the board office so if the district business manager needs to see them, they are at his disposal. Also, when the district's books are audited annually, so are the store's."

As the store has been required to switch away from items that contain mainly sugar (where sugar is listed as the main ingredient), they have started concentrating on snacks like bagels and select Otis Spunkmeyer products such as their small muffins. For drinks, they are moving toward light juices, water and sports drinks. As a new vendor, Tropicana wondered how the store could sell 40 cases a week. A curious van full of visitors from Tropicana made a site visit to find out. Fae says wisely, "SBEs are an untapped resource for vendors."

Vendor relations can take on a special dimension for an SBE. When Fae's members made a presentation at the PTA, she asked Lenox if they had any small gifts to give to association members. Lenox went a step farther and donated 24 small crystal bowls. Since your SBE is a nonprofit educational venture, vendors can be generous with you in unexpected ways.

Dealing with the requirements of the school's cafeteria can be challenging for school stores. Fae has put effort into building a mutually beneficial relationship with the manager of their school's cafeteria. The store stops selling food for the lunch hour. The cafeteria manager buys a lot of supplies through the school store: cream cheese for bagels, good coffee, etc. When the DECA chapter has their Free Enterprise Lunch, the cafeteria caters it. This is a good lesson in building bridges over potential rough spots.

The seniors in her program create the SBE certifying manual. Fae says the manual helps enormously in organizing the data necessary to run the store. "If a board member or business manager needs statistics, I just bring out the book. The seniors work on it, and it gives them a better understanding: monthly reports, stock turnover, how much revenue per square foot, etc." This is an important point about SBE certification—the process validates the educational experience of members, and that can only help in your relationships in your school.

Thank you, Fae, for sharing your insights and practices. Valued advisors, watch this and other publications for an account of the ambitious fund-raising activities at Cinnaminson.

