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First Young Entrepreneurs Class to Present their Case for Business Funding April 4

Five minutes. That's the amount of time students in the Mobile Area Chamber's inaugural Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA) have to pitch the businesses they have envisioned, developed and nurtured to an investor panel for funding.

Thirteen students, all from the Alabama School of Math and Science (ASMS), were selected as the pilot group of a U.S. Chamber of Commerce-sponsored program adopted locally by the Mobile Area Chamber. Students participated in 30 weeks of after-school instruction at the University of South Alabama (USA) learning how to create a business plan, logo and website, and conduct market research.

On Monday, April 4, the efforts by three partners – the Chamber, ASMS and USA – along with the sweat equity of the students come to fruition. The program begins at 5:30 p.m. at the Mobile Area Chamber, 451 Government St.

“Anytime we can nurture and strengthen entrepreneurship, we are building future wealth and ensuring a stronger tomorrow. What we’re seeing through YEA is that high school students are innovative. Our partnership with the Alabama School of Math and Science and the University of South Alabama is sure to yield impressive results,” said the Mobile Area Chamber’s President and CEO Bill Sisson.

The panel of investors includes **Dr. Ron Eastburn**, assistant professor, USA Mitchell College of Business; **Mike Dow**, executive vice president sales & marketing, Centralite; **Brent McClure**, chief financial officer, Chalkable; **Andy Newton**, president & CEO, Southern Light; **John Peebles**, principal, NAI Mobile; **Jill Stork**, division area manager, Alabama Power Co.; and **Mel Washington**, regional manager & lead counselor, Alabama Small Business Development Center at USA.

The students will present seven business ideas from products to services to nonprofit organizations, competing for \$6,000. Start-up monies were donated by local YEA sponsors, including Chalkable, Alabama Power, Sam’s Club, Warren Averett, Workshops Etc! and the Ben May Charitable Trust.

The presenters and businesses will be:

- Anasofia Guajardo, Wesley Oliver, Sung-Hoon Park, Ambria Walker: Diddo Case
- Catherine Minor: Fruity Beauty
- Eric Lee: Odyssey
- Genevieve Tillman: Perk Packs
- Messiah Williams: Rural Rebuilders of America
- Isabella Fank & Dominique Williams: Shoe Boo
- Jon Ross Sanders: “Southern Scenes”

And just like the popular television show, *Shark Tank*, the entrepreneurs will learn that night how much funding they will receive based on appeal and merit. The result – Mobile will have several new, legal, fully formed companies and social movements.

“We are delighted that ASMS students have the opportunity to participate in this phenomenal program. The YEA Academy speaks to the ideas and concepts we want our students to learn. Teaching entrepreneurship skills fosters innovation and strengthens leadership skills that our students will be able to use in college and beyond. This collaborative program with ASMS, the Chamber of Commerce and the University of South Alabama has been great partnership and a rewarding experience for our students,” said ASMS President Monica Motley.

One Mobile-developed business will advance to a regional competition, and six regional winners advance to the YEA Saunders Scholars National College Scholarship competition for scholarships, business start-up packages and an all-expenses paid trip to attend the U.S. Chamber’s America’s Small Business Summit in Washington D.C.

ASMS students were selected through an application and interview process and will graduate from the program on May 2.

About YEA

YEA was founded in 2004 at the University of Rochester with support from the Kauffman Foundation. It is an after-school, year-long program with nearly 3,000 graduates who launched more than 1,700 businesses. The U.S. Chamber became a national sponsor and partner of the Young Entrepreneurs Academy in 2011. Mobile is one of 168 communities across the U.S.

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