

# A Marketplace Of Ideas

Valley Students Put Marketing Into Practice At Annual GEM Fair

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By [Emily Sharrer](#)



Brooke Marshall, 9, and Lexi Lam, 8, make a sale at the Global Entrepreneurship Marketplace Fair at the JMU Convocation Center Thursday. The fair, now in its 11th year, is designed to give students a firsthand look at how products are developed and then sold.



Banana-costume-clad Lauren Guidroz, 14, and Lania Schumacher, 13, from Elkton Middle School, answer judges' questions about their baked goods.

HARRI SONBURG - With a lot of rocks, dozens of googly eyes, a little paint and a stellar marketing campaign, 9-year-old Anna Bishop, creator of Anna's Pet Rock Emporium, had no problem finding customers at Thursday's Global Entrepreneurship Marketplace Fair.

The fair, now in its 11th year, brought together students mostly from Rockingham, Greene and Rappahannock counties and Harrisonburg to participate in a simulated marketplace. The products

were created during a smaller classroom simulation called the Mini-Society.

On Thursday, students traded goods using GEMS, a student-designed currency named after the fair.

As Lynne Stover, the market master, rang the cowbell signifying the start of the fair around 10:15 a.m., Anna, along with about 500 other young "business owners," sprinted up the steps of James Madison University's Convocation Center, excited to make their first sale of the day.

"It is the most fun event of the entire year," said Stover, who is a teacher-consultant for the JMU Center for Economic Education, which organizes the event each year. "The kids really worked hard to get ready for this."

The fair, which includes students in grades three through eight, is funded by Shenandoah Valley Economic Education Inc. and the National Council on Economic Education, said Bill Wood, director of the JMU Center for Economic Education.

Wood, who has been involved with the fair since it began, said this year was one of the most diverse.

"The mix of products was the best I have seen at a GEM Fair," he said.

Tables were packed with bookmarks, bracelets, bags, cupcakes, flowers and many more crafty items.

Many products were made from recycled materials in honor of this year's "green theme."

At the aptly named Scrappy Sack Shack, business owners Hannah Breen and Kathryn Hawkins were mobbed with customers wanting to purchase the girls' eco-chic homemade tote bags.

The two became involved in the event through the Creative Kids Co-Op, an educational program for home-schooled kids. They received a firsthand lesson in supply and demand when their bags sold out within the fair's first hour.

"I like it a lot. It's been a great learning experience," said Hannah, the 11-year-old daughter of Ronny and Natalie Breen of Highland County.

The Energy Bolt, a store specializing in "Icees," proved to be another of the most successful products of the day.

Brian Diaz, Bradley Mitchell and Mathew Reid, all 11-year-old South River Elementary School students, had more than 50 sales in a half-hour's time. Armed with Hawaiian Fruit Punch and an ice-grinding machine, they were ready for many more.

Furthermore, they were keen on selling handmade bracelets made from recycled materials to do their part to help the environment.

"We think the green theme is a help to our Earth because the factories are going to start polluting the air, so we need to stop them by making eco-friendly products," said Mathew, the son of Keith and Crystal Reid, speaking on behalf of the trio of best friends.

As the event wound down around noon, Stover was hopeful that the kids' experience would play a role in their futures.

"I'm looking forward to 10 years from now walking down the street and seeing one of these little shops set up - that's my dream," she said.

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