

SHOREVIEW PRESS &gt; NEWS

## Mounds View student initiative leads to \$13,000 in online computer sales

Print Page

### *Junior runs eBay auctions to move outdated equipment*

by **Jeanne Roberts**  
Contributing Writer

Published:  
Tuesday, May 18, 2010 12:13 PM CDT

ARDEN HILLS — For Mounds View High School junior James Thompson, it's more than a business — it's a path to a more promising future.

That's thanks to a Mounds View school program called Steps to Success through which Thompson and fellow student Jack Gimm have partnered with their dean and the district's technology department to auction the school's used computer equipment on eBay.



Alvarez and Thompson show off some of the school's eBay merchandise. - Submitted photo

Under the business name "Schoolsout" and assisted by Steps to Success coordinator and Dean Amy Alvarez and district Technology Director Nick Temali, Thompson successfully sells outdated electronic equipment through one of the world's best-known online retailers. As a result of the project, Thompson took first place and won a \$5,000 scholarship to Boston University at the 43rd SkillsUSA Championships State Conference in Bloomington April 9. Next, he and fellow student Crystal Trevino will represent Mounds View at the National SkillsUSA Leadership and Skills Conference in Kansas City, Mo., June 20 to 25.

The idea for the eBay project came to Alvarez after she learned how much it costs simply to recycle electronics (up to \$25 per item, according to state licensing laws). By selling them in an auction, Alvarez explained the school district both becomes compliant and makes a little money that can further the program. For example, half of the eBay revenues from this year will go toward funding the Steps to Success program.

Those profits are considerable. According to Alvarez, the program began in October and is currently halfway through the year, with \$13,000 in revenue. In spite of its profitability, though, Amy says the program is more about saving.

"You can look at the money we make, or look at the money we've saved. Though I have no idea exactly how much that is, I do know that, for years, the school district paid out thousands of dollars to recycle (through state agencies)."

Once Alvarez had the shape of the project firmly in hand, she helped the school's technology department design a program that would help the department by getting rid of old electronics at a reasonable cost, and the students by teaching them how to operate a successful Internet business.

With the help of Lindsay Luczkowiak, the school's behavioral manager, a plan emerged that is good for both students and the school. Thompson and Gimm, for example, are responsible for posting items, collecting funds, shipping goods, identifying supply needs, running the office and more.

Eventually, according to Alvarez, the eBay project may be expanded.

"Now, it's all we can do to manage the workload," she noted. "The computers have to be prepped,

the drives erased, and someone has to make sure they are in working order, or, if not, that they are listed that way on e-Bay.”

But with evidence of success in hand, finding the next batch of student entrepreneurs may be even easier. And the need for expansion — exacerbated by the fact that the middle schools (Chippewa, Edgewood and Highview) are due to get new computers — is apparent.

Because Mounds View is the only area school district with this kind of computer parts recycling program, Alvarez said at some point the district might want to contract with other area school districts to sell their used computer equipment for them, perhaps even at a modest profit.

About the two programs

Steps to Success is an independent program, but collaborates with another national program called SkillsUSA. The former attempts to put ninth- and 10th-grade students at risk of not graduating in a position to learn and develop entrepreneurial skills. For Steps to Success students, the smaller classes, core areas of study, and increased teacher support ensure that students will acquire a high school diploma, as well as some needed career skills.

SkillsUSA is a national program collaborative of students, teachers and industry trying to ensure that the nation has a skilled work force in the near future. Serving more than 307,000 high school and college students (and professional members) enrolled in training programs for technical, skilled labor, and service occupations like medicine, this program is headed, in the Mounds View School District, by Career Education Department member and student advisor Lynn Stupke, who also runs a class called Work Experience.

The eBay site requires about two hours a day, or two 55-minute classrooms sessions, though Thompson admits he also works on weekends. But the time is less relevant than the result. For Thompson, the program has changed his life.

“I have learned a lot, and had experiences that let me do more,” he said. “But the most important thing I learned was new communications skills.”

Thompson, a member of Stupke's Work Experience group, was also being groomed by Stupke for a leadership role within SkillsUSA. That made him a likely candidate for the entrepreneurial role within Steps, since he required a job (one of the requirements for the Work Experience program).

At the SkillsUSA Championships State Conference, his fellow SkillsUSA participants Crystal Trevino and Nick Bushor also won scholarships. Bushor also took second place in Computer Maintenance Technology, winning a second \$500 scholarship from Dakota County Technical College.

Their fellow students Elly Bacig, Brianna Hershey and Becca Hable also won \$5,000 scholarships to Boston University, Bacig for her second-place win in the Career Display category, Hershey for her third-place Career Display, and Hable for third place in Customer Service Presentation.

Copyright © 2010 - Press Publications

[x] Close Window