

## **Rotary Business Academy Program**

Sparks Rotary      Joe Donohue      774-425-4247

**Program Summary:** The Rotary Business Academy is a business simulation open to all high school students.

Students form companies of at least 3 students plus one Business Consultant to compete with other student companies to design, develop and sell an Internet WEB site to a real local business, owned by a Rotary member.

The Business Consultants (volunteer Rotarians) use their experience to provide advice, counsel and guidance to the student companies. Students assume all leadership, design, marketing and sales roles.

Students are coached to follow a structured sales process in all interactions with the client. Professional business conduct is expected. There are no "gotchas"...the client will not mislead the teams but will provide any information asked for.

The eight-week contest begins in early October and runs through the end of November. Final presentations are conducted the first week of December.

Each student team must submit a formal written proposal in order to qualify to participate in the final presentation. All customer interactions are graded. Feedback sessions are offered to all student companies from the judges.

The winning student company wins \$1,000 in prize money. Second and third place prizes are also awarded. Total prize money for the contest is \$1,500.

**Focus of the Program:** Participants receive many valuable business insights not ordinarily taught in the school curriculum. Students have to display many business skills, including:

- Technical competence
- Time management
- Marketing
- Sales
- Presentation skills
- Professional behavior
- Team building
- Organization skills
- Presentation skills
- Artistic design

**How is the program best implemented:** The school district must recognize the educational benefits to their students and they must be actively involved in promoting the program through the high schools. There is no added work required of the school

staff, just encouragement and support. The parent community also plays a big role in driving participation but they must be reached through the schools.

**Results of the program:** The program was conducted by the San Ramon Valley Rotary club (d 5160) from 1998 to 2004 with very good results. Each year there were 25 - 50 students that made it all the way to the final presentations. The school district was a very active participant but the Rotary Club ran the program and supplied all the judges and the client each year.

The program was run in 2004, 2005 and 2007 in Washoe County by the Sparks Rotary Club (d 5190) with disappointing results. In 2007, 30 Sparks Rotarians volunteered to function as business consultants but only 9 students participated despite our making presentations at 8 high schools.

While we believed that those 9 kids learned business skills far beyond anything they could have received otherwise, the time and effort required were better spent in other community activities. Our club was simply unable to get the school district to participate in any meaningful way.

The web site for RBA is still available at [www.RBANevada.org](http://www.RBANevada.org). Our client was Industrial Equipment Repair, owned by a Sparks Rotarian; some of the students' web sites are still available, as is the full Welcome Package.