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By Mary Crawford, NCTA News

Brewing up a business

CURTIS, Neb. – Cup of Joe on the Go is just the shot of java needed to start the day for college students at their agricultural campus in Curtis.

A second-year, start-up venture for business students in the “Management Concepts” class at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture has become a satisfying treat for customers for three hours on Tuesday and Wednesdays mornings.

“I enjoy working there and seeing people before classes and after classes, and visiting with people I might not get to see otherwise,” said Clare Smith of Marysville, Kansas, a student on the purchasing committee.

“The class has taught me really good skills like time management, getting everything there for supplies, and communicating with others in a business environment,” said Smith, a livestock management major and business minor. “It definitely is a lot of work, but it is preparing us for futures in business. I really enjoy the class.”

Three or four students per group are assigned to Marketing and Promotion, Accounting and Finance, Purchasing, Operations, Human Resources, and Sales Committees.

Warm, baked goodies and featured snacks such as breakfast burritos are popular menu items. And, once the coffee price dropped from \$2 per cup to \$1, sales took off. Customers pay \$3 for a breakfast burrito and coffee.

Cup of Joe on the Go operates from 7:30 to 10:30 a.m. near the NCTA Welcome Center in the lobby of the Nebraska Agriculture Industry Education Center.

Students set up tables at 6:30 a.m. each Tuesday and Wednesday near the auditorium, haul in supplies and greet customers. Traffic is greatest between classes.

Customers arrive from across campus with students, staff and faculty stopping by, and on occasion, local residents from Curtis and visitors to campus.



NCTA students ready for customers are, from left, Jared Sullivan of Aurora, Brock Pollat of Cozad, Trevin Likens of Fairbury, and Clare Smith of Marysville, Kansas. (Brent Thomas/NCTA News photo)

Two of the busiest mornings for breakfast and hot or cold beverages saw members of the NCTA Statewide Advisory hosted by NCTA Dean Ron Rosati on November 14 and FFA customers with district livestock judging contests the week before.

“We’ve had a couple bumps in the road as with any business but we definitely overcame those difficulties and have made our shop into a “go to” place for students and faculty,” said Alyssa Nowicki of Grand Island. She coordinates marketing and promotion.

Students do not have access to a kitchen for weekly baking, so some gather on Monday evenings at the home kitchen of instructor Mary Rittenhouse.

There, they prepare the breakfast burritos and assist with food prep, sharing camaraderie while Rittenhouse bakes what the students will feature on that week’s’ menu.

As an associate professor and chair of the Agribusiness Management Systems division, Rittenhouse also serves as CEO of the student-driven business.

New menu items such as breakfast bites (in both meat and vegetarian bites) were sampled, first, when Rittenhouse made them at home and delivered the treats to her classroom on the third floor of Ag Hall.

“The goal of this semester project is to provide an experiential learning opportunity about management skills,” explains Rittenhouse.

The course teaches business management in planning, organizing, leading, and controlling, and the four C’s of required corporate skills - communications, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity, she says.

“Students are learning the complexities of each of these skills,” adds the baker of the always-popular cinnamon rolls and German apple kuchen. Customers look forward to buying her baked goods.

“I bring items for the class to make a group decision,” Rittenhouse says. “We calculate the cost per item of what I bake and I submit an invoice to the coffee shop, just like a vendor to a business.”

Strong team building and communications among the 18 students, along with flexibility, is important in addressing challenges, said Nowicki. “I really have enjoyed this experience.”

“In the beginning I was skeptical about if it was going to all fall into place and if we were going to get any business, she adds. “But our class really came together as a team and made sure we got everything we needed to be done so that our coffee shop could be as successful as possible.”

Find this article online at:

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