

Mock shop camp helps kids build self-esteem

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BY SHARON GITTLEMAN
FREE PRESS SPECIAL WRITER

When Sister Alice Baker, 71, decided to retire after teaching students for 41 years at schools within the Archdiocese of Detroit, she knew exactly what she wanted to do.

In 2005, she joined six other nuns to continue their teaching work, creating the Epiphany Education Center in Detroit.

Youngsters come to the center for free tutoring during the school year and to learn more about the business world in a two-week summer workshop. Youths in grades four through eight visit with entrepreneurs, learn the fundamentals of business and create their own companies.

"I want to give the children many skills, including how to organize," said Baker, a former Detroiter, now a Harper Woods resident.

Youngsters learn how to set up financial records, create a budget and spend the play money they earn on goods and services.

On market day, parents, visitors and friends are invited to stop by the youths' mock shops to make purchases.

"It's a hands-on experience," said Baker.

Youths also get a taste of the political aspects of the real world when they form a town council and make decisions for their imaginary community.

"They'll learn how to deal with competition," she said. "They learn how to wheel and deal."

At the end of the workshop, youths are asked the big question -- how they could make things better for everybody the next time around.

Gene Gizzarelli, chairman of Needhelpers.com, will speak to the kids about creating profitable businesses.

His Web-based company connects people who provide services with people who need them.

"My whole business is about dealing with entrepreneurs," said Gizzarelli, 50, a Bloomfield Hills resident. "I can help people like other people helped me become successful."

He plans to teach the youths about the importance of planning and seizing opportunities.

"A big part of my discussion is motivation," he said.

Children he's spoken to at other venues often ask him to critique the type of businesses they are planning. One group of youths wondered how they could send their car designs to Ford Motor Co.

"It's planting the seeds in their heads about where they want to go," he said.

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