

Young entrepreneurs display business prowess through Summer Company initiative



For some students, summer vacation is a time of relaxation. For others, it's a chance to get a job and earn some money for the future.

Aurora's Ryker Manherz, however, has used his summer to start his own business, Deck Doctors, using his skills with woodworking and tools to not only spruce up the decks of clients, but their fences and patios as well.

Manherz is one of more than a dozen York Region students who have put their entrepreneurial skills to the test through the 2026 Summer Company Program, an initiative of the York Small Business Enterprise Centre, which provides seed funding, mentorship, and more to help young entrepreneurs get their business ideas off the ground.

Deck Doctors was one of seven such Summer Company businesses showcased at Regional Headquarters last week, ahead of a second showcase this Friday, July 17, at Upper Canada Mall from 11.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m., where members of the public are invited to come out and engage with these innovative business leaders of tomorrow and learn more about their initiatives of today.

‘We got a lot of applications this year, which shows that young entrepreneurs are really looking into this as a career option,’ says Eva Lee, Small Business Consultant, with the York Small Business Enterprise Centre.

Lee says applications from interested students typically fall into one of two categories – traditional, such as window and car washing, deck cleaning, and landscaping, and a more creative stream, which has resulted in businesses as diverse as jewellery engraving and cake decorating.

‘This program has been operating for a lot of years now and it is organized by the Ontario Government, which the York Small Business Enterprise Centre is helping to facilitate the program within the Northern Six communities of York Region,’ says Lee, referring to the communities of Aurora, King, Newmarket, Stouffville, East Gwillimbury and Georgina. ‘The support we provide includes workshops, and it covers a lot of hands-on and practical topics like marketing, how to use A.I. with your business, how to do your bookkeeping, how to set up your entrepreneurial mindset, and how to manage your risk. It’s not like classes where you go to school; it’s very practical things that you can use on your business directly.’

In addition to last week's showcase at the Regional Office and what's in store for Upper Canada Mall this Friday, participating students also promoted their businesses at last month's Aurora Street Festival, hosted by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce. The benefit of these engagement opportunities for new business owners is not only exposure but real-time lessons on how to engage with the public – and, thereby, potential customers and clients.

“Every time they do a showcase, they further polish their strategy and that helps build their entrepreneurial mindset,” says Lee. “On top of that, we also have one-on-one mentorship, which connects students with a specific mentor where we see a good fit, and we also have online Mastermind classes, which is a group where everyone talks about the issues they are facing right now, and then we’ll have mentors to talk in smaller groups to address issues as a group.”

“They don’t just learn from their mentor, they learn how others are solving problems as well.”

Grants provided through this initiative can be as much as \$3,000 per successful applicant.

Manherz says the application process involved a bit of paperwork, but was well worth it.

“They give you so many opportunities to grow your business and it is just an amazing program,” he says, adding he recently completed a big fence job through Deck Doctors. “The biggest lesson I’ve learned is that the hardest thing to do is just sales. Me and a couple of my friends go door to door and it’s the hardest thing to do [but] I’m planning on growing my business into this summer, the next summer, and maybe the summer after that.”

For more information about the Summer Company Program, including how to join a wait list for current opportunities and get ready for the next round of applications, visit yorklink.ca/smallbusiness/summer-company.

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