

# NOT-FOR-PROFITS

## Spotlight



Bob Gigliore

**BIZ KIDS:** Commerce Plaza President Jamie Bogenshutz gives youngsters a sense of the business world early on in their lives.

**W**e make business decisions every day that affect our profitability. What is the correct level of advertising? How to price inventory? What's the correct level of staffing? How much financing do I need to significantly cover cash flow needs? We make equally important personal choices involving career choices, savings and lunch options.

Decisions, decisions, decisions. These are not easy ones. In fact, two out of three start-up businesses fail in their first two years of operations often due to poorly made ones. Many business owners do not understand the basic concepts of business and proper planning. In many instances, their own business are their first exposure to many of these concepts.

Wouldn't it be great to learn business concepts while still in elementary school? That is the concept behind Commerce Plaza. The agency, along with its business partners, has converted approximately 3,000 square feet on the grounds of Plainedge High School into a business community for 5th and 6th grade students.

Students get a sense of what it is like to be part of the business world by being executives for a day.

"Students make insightful connec-

what working is like" explained Commerce Plaza board member Jerry Siegel.

At Commerce Plaza, children work in various businesses sponsored by the agency's business partners. Commerce Plaza contains a mock town hall, complete with student mayor; newspaper; real estate office; bank; copy center; professional office; wellness & communication center; utility; food court and warehouse. Students learn hands-on about the interactivity of business and the consequences of their actions as each decision affects their bottom line profitability.

Students also learn the importance of deadlines as newspapers and phone books need to go to print; the significance of charities as pledges are made to the Neighborhood Way; the concept of democracy as ballots are cast; the need for good health as nurses provide physicals for employees and the benefits of recycling.

The bank, sponsored by EAB, plays a central role in Commerce Plaza. Students, who earn two paychecks during their full day stay at Commerce Plaza, learn what it is like to bank and to wait on line during lunch breaks. Students learn

and are able to make connections between what is done in the business world and what they learned in the classroom during the six-week preparatory training.

Amanda Lippertshauser, a ten-year-old participant at Commerce Plaza whose job for the day was a reporter for *Long Island Business News*, describes her experience at Commerce Plaza. "I learned that people who are older have a lot of responsibilities, paying their rent, paying back loans and talking to a lot of other businesses to get information. We learned things in school and then got to do them here."

The issues that these students learn during their trip to Commerce Plaza are the same issues that the agency's staff grapples with on a daily basis.

"We are constantly looking to forge new business partnerships," said Commerce Plaza's Executive Director, Jamie Bogenshutz. "Without them we cannot realize our goal of a 20,000-square-foot permanent community."

Business partners are very active in Commerce Plaza, sending staff, reviewing course material, developing job descriptions and even, in the case of McDonald's, providing lunch for the student business people.

Commerce Plaza allows young business people to experience, not just observe. It generates enthusiasm, perception and insight that only hands on interactivity can foster. And it allows children to relate to what we, as parents, do all day.

Kenneth R. Cerini is the managing partner of Cerini & Associates, a full-service CPA firm. If you are a not-for-profit agency and have an interesting story to tell, call (631) 582-1600 or visit Cerini online at [www.ceriniandassociates.com](http://www.ceriniandassociates.com).

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