



Class of 2014 Grads Collaborate to Improve Agri-Business Education for Frederick County High School Students

It all began with a conversation on a bus. Dave Esworthy, market president of First United Bank and Trust in Frederick, Md., and Charlotte Davis, executive director of the Rural Maryland Council, were classmates in Leadership Maryland's Class of 2014, and were seated next to each other on the ride to one of their sessions. Along the way, Dave and Charlotte discovered they had a common interest in growing job opportunities in Maryland's rural communities, as Dave shared an idea he'd had recently to improve the career training available for high school students in his home county.

"In addition to my work for the bank, I also serve on a committee at Frederick Community College that offers advice on the curriculum for the school's business program. I told Charlotte that I wished it was possible for FCC's business program to partner with Frederick County Public Schools' Career & Technology Center to offer management training or entrepreneurship classes to the high school students in the trade programs," said Dave. "I thought that if the high school kids could learn not only the technical skills, but the ins and outs of starting and managing a business, it would add a whole new dimension to their education. I had discussed the idea with the business program manager at FCC and he loved the idea, but said they would need money to make it happen. And that's when Charlotte told me about the Rural Maryland Council's grant program."

Charlotte explained that the Rural Maryland Council focuses on the needs of Maryland's rural communities, including local economic development. Each year, the Council receives money from the state's operating budget that allows it to offer a grant program to help rural-serving non-profit organizations fund projects within the categories of agriculture, economic development, workforce development, energy development, community development, health care and world broadband.

"Dave was passionate about promoting entrepreneurship in his area, and that's something that we are also interested in. We believe that when an entrepreneur is mentored and grown in a rural community, they are more likely to stay in that community and contribute to the local economy," Charlotte said. "Dave and I discussed his idea to not just teach our students the science and production side of agriculture, but to combine the business side and teach them to form a business and marketing plan. Informally, we talked about his idea for the program and what components would help make it a strong application for our grant, and Dave took that idea and ran with it!"

Back home, Dave contacted the principal at the Career and Technology Center about the opportunity, and they formed a committee with representatives from Frederick County Public Schools and FCC to brainstorm how to put a program together that might be appealing for the

grant. Since Charlotte did not serve on the grant review board, she was able to offer advice on how to make the application as strong as it could be.

After two months of work, the final grant application proposed a program that would enable high school agriculture students at the Career & Technology Center to take management and entrepreneurship classes for college credit at FCC. In addition, the students would also take regular field trips to local businesses to meet the owners and learn first-hand about growing and running a successful business. The application asked for \$25,000 in funding, and in August 2015, Dave received word from the Rural Maryland Council that they would be awarded the full amount.

“The Rural Maryland Council loved the idea, and said it was one of the best grant applications they’ve ever received,” said Dave. “This program will allow our high school students to not only learn the technical skill, but how to run a business and put together a business plan, as well as gain general management skills and exposure to local businesses they can use as models. The funding will be used for building new infrastructure to offer even more opportunities, including a new apiary at the Career & Technology Center that will allow students to learn beekeeping, because there is such a shortage of bees and beekeepers.”

“We see a lot of applications that have a germ of an idea, but there are a lot of technical aspects missing,” said Charlotte. “What was really innovative about this application was that it created a streamlined path for the students from high school to community college and then to a four-year school or the workforce. It helps kids to be a little more career minded earlier on, and to know their long-term plans from the beginning.”

Now that the grant has been awarded, Dave’s committee will work to put together the new program’s curriculum and begin construction. The program should be ready for students by the second semester of the 2016 school year.

Dave and Charlotte’s collaboration on this program is a great example of how Leadership Maryland inspires real, actionable change by bringing together leaders from all sectors, industries and geographic regions of Maryland to learn about and engage on the vital issues affecting the state.

“It really hit me after this grant opportunity that this is what Leadership Maryland talks about. They want to bring us together to make things happen. I get it now,” said Charlotte. “I can really demonstrate the value of what we can do when you put us together.”

“We would never have gotten the money to make this program happen if it weren’t for Leadership Maryland and that bus ride!” said Dave.

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