

## East Canton game night plan wins 'Stark Tank'

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**JACKSON TWP.** A group of seventh-graders from East Canton Middle School have a plan to reduce isolation, increase the wisdom of the younger generation and fill the void for kids who have no grandparents.

"Do you sit at home bored with nothing to do and no one to interact with?" they asked an auditorium full of their peers on Thursday.

A Venn diagram was displayed on the screen behind them. On one side: East Canton Middle School students. On the other: East Canton senior citizens. In the middle: community game night.

Their idea: Use the Foltz Community Center to host weekly or monthly game nights so that middle-school students and senior citizens can hang out together.

"Think about it," the students continued. "Do you really want our community elderly to be depressed?"

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The "Stark Tank" event was the culmination of a months-long, countywide entrepreneurship program for middle-schoolers born out of the Strengthening Stark initiative.

Strengthening Stark is an economic development effort designed to improve quality of life for everybody in Stark County. It has three big focus areas: developing a strong local talent pool, making Stark County a more attractive place to live and work, and strengthening the business sector.

The entrepreneurship piece falls under the business growth component of Strengthening Stark. The goal of the program is to get middle-schoolers thinking about staying in Stark County as adults and possibly bolstering the economy by starting new businesses.

The program started in October, when more than 100 middle-school students gathered at the University of Mount Union for an introduction to entrepreneurship that included conversations with founders of local companies and a brainstorming session about things in Stark County the students would like to see changed.

On Thursday, they met at Stark State College to pitch their problem-solving ideas.

After the top six teams were selected, those students presented their solutions to a panel of judges, who peppered them with questions about potential costs and feasibility.

The six ideas were:

- Community game night (Osnaburg Local Schools)
- Composting (North Canton City Schools): Put composting bins in the lunchroom at the middle school to reduce food waste and create natural fertilizer for a community garden.
- SmartChores app (Sandy Valley Local Schools): Create an app for kids and parents that locks social media apps on kids' phones until they prove to their parents they've completed their chore lists. The app would give parents the ability to set time frames for the chores, create lists, restrict apps, and receive visual proof that the chores are

completed.

- Vape Spies (Plain Local Schools): Develop unnoticeable detectors that would alert parents or school resource officers to vaping using an app.
- Shorter class periods (Louisville City Schools): Reduce the length of core class periods so that students can concentrate better and have more time to eat lunch and socialize.
- Reusable shopping bags (Fairless Local Schools): Encourage community members to use reusable shopping bags by selling cloth bags, increasing the number of bag recycling stations, and teaching elementary school students how to make reusable bags out of old T-shirts.

After a lengthy deliberation, judges presented the seventh-graders from Osnaburg with the win — and a check for \$1,000.

“We didn’t think this would happen,” Carter Menegay said.

“We’re a really small school,” Nevaeh Reed chimed in.

Now that they’ve got the money in hand, their next step is to start planning the first game night, expected to be in the fall.

The students already presented the idea to the board at the community center. Members were supportive and suggested the students also could help the seniors with technology while they’re there.

Karren Kandel, the gifted coordinator for kindergarten through eighth grade at Osnaburg Local Schools who advised the team, said she didn’t do much other than give a couple of notes about presentation.

“The way they have grown is amazing to me,” she said.

While the judges decided the winners on Thursday, Stark Education Partnership President Teresa Purses asked all the students to pitch their ideas to the administrative teams at their school.

As she walked around the room asking students what they’d liked about the experience, one said she appreciated that the adults listened and took their ideas seriously.

“You had amazing ideas,” Purses said. “How could anybody not say they were valuable?”

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