

TWO GIRLS AND A BEVY OF WAFFLES

Southeast High School seniors take home entrepreneur grand prize with 'Waffles on Wheels'

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In keeping with the Chinese philosophy, Camrin Sellers and Katey Freeman could be described as one another's yin and yang – they each boast contrary elements that are complementary.

"She's more outspoken, I'm more reserved," Sellers said. "It's the perfect combination."

This "perfect combination" has made for a long-spanning friendship and more recently an award-winning business partnership.

Sellers and Freeman – both seniors at Southeast High School – recently won first prize at the Cherokee County Youth Entrepreneur Fair for their Waffles on Wheels business concept and pitch.

A food truck that offers more than 42 varieties of waffles and travels to various events, the Waffles on Wheels idea came to Sellers and Freeman while in class one day.

"We thought a food truck would be fun," Freeman said.

"We were thinking (about) a cooking truck," Sellers said.

"... and then we thought waffles would be cool," Freeman said.

Incentivized by the entrepreneurial fair – in which the pair received second place last year – Sellers and Freeman decided to devise a business plan and compete again.

"This year we wrote our business plan in two weeks" Freeman said. "Last year we had more time, but this year, being seniors, we have so many things to do."

The two charged through the process. Their completed 16-page plan provided a roadmap "so detailed, it was as if they were going to start in the next month," Freeman said. It included a proposed income statement, balance sheet, startup costs, target market – and an elevator pitch. With the help of Freeman's graphic designer sister, the duo also created a logo, menus and t-shirts.

Needless to say, their efforts impressed the judges. "We are very proud of the development we've seen in the two of them," said Janet Miller, Cherokee County Economic Development Director.

"They entered last year and did well but really took what they learned at the regional competition last year and took that and brought it to a new level at this

year's competition."

Out of the 15 participating individuals and teams, Freeman and Sellers landed first place, a \$1500 award sponsored by the Joplin Regional Partnership, and the chance to take part in the state entrepreneurial competition in April.

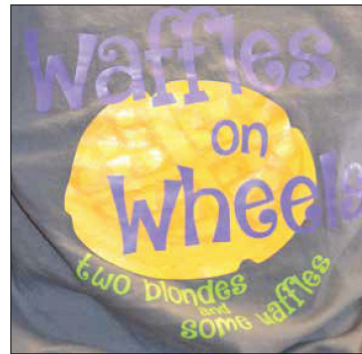
According to Miller, the entrepreneurial fair offers a dual goal.

"From the community perspective, one of our focuses as a county economic development group is how can we help the businesses we have and also spark new ventures in our community," Miller said.

"We have an interest in entrepreneurship and, like anything, I think it is good to start working with folks at as young of an age as we possibly can. So this is an effort to get the youth involved and give them those tools early on in hopes that down the line some of them stick around and or return to our county and create businesses."

From the student's perspective, I think the more knowledge and information we can put in their hands about career options, whether that is working for someone else or starting their own venture, we want to try and do that."

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JRBJ photo by STACEY LINDSAY

Camrin Sellers and Katey Freeman are the two Southeast High School students behind Waffles on Wheels. The Waffles business concept won them a grand prize at the Cherokee County Youth Entrepreneur Fair.

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Both Sellers and Freeman said they enjoyed the enthusiasm and support from Miller and those involved. They also gave accolades to their high school business teacher Cherie Witt for teaching them the basics of business marketing and management.

With its eclectic savory to sweet menu, the duo believes Waffles on Wheels offers a unique entity for their region – and satisfies all customer tastes.

"We are going to give more than just a waffle with maple syrup," Freeman said. "We're going to give you biscuits and gravy. We're going to give you pizza, an omelet."

"So then we think we can have people for breakfast, lunch, supper and dessert," Sellers said.

"You can get your lunch and dessert all in the same place," Freeman said.

"And there is really nothing like it in this area," Freeman said.

The duo said one of the entrepreneurial fair judges who represented KansasWorks believed Waffles on Wheels has a lucrative future in southeast Kansas and offered to help Freeman and Sellers take it to the next level.

But that is yet to be determined, they said. The state competition is next and after that, both Sellers and Freeman have their futures set on attending Northeast Oklahoma University.

Regardless, they both said the Waffles on Wheels endeavor is one that makes them proud. And when asked about their favorite part of the journey, the answer is obvious.

"Winning!" Sellers said.

"It made it feel like it was all worth it," Freeman said. "We spent so much time and effort," Freeman said.

"Hours and hours," Sellers said.

The team is headed to Manhattan, Kansas for the state competition on April 20.