

Chippewa Valley students take top awards at Macomb Innovates

High school students earn team awards and pitch creative ideas on college



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Creative and unique ideas to design the college experience of the future earned Chippewa Valley High School students top honors at a recent Macomb Community College event.

A Macomb Innovates! – College Reimagined event was hosted by the Macomb Community College (MCC) Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship on April 17 at the Albert L. Lorenzo Cultural Center in Clinton Township. Macomb Community College and local high school students were invited to pitch their creative ideas about the future of college to an audience and a panel of judges.

Judges for the student pitch contest were:

- Macomb Community College Dean of Business, IT and Culinary Michael Balsamo
- Velocity Center Senior Advisor for Entrepreneurship and Innovation April Jones-Boyle
- Intermediate School District CTE Administrator and Educational Consultant Shannon Williams

MCC Director for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Ellen Lux is also the director of workforce and continuing education for business and information technology at MCC. She said that this year marked the first time since 2019 that the Macomb Innovates! event has been held, and that she was excited to relaunch the concept this year.

“In this case we were looking at trends such as decline in enrollment in higher education,” Lux said.

Lux added students were asked to weigh in on this challenge and offer solutions as to what would make a college environment more attractive to students. Student presentations were meant to help develop communication skills, resiliency, and to prepare them for future work or life environments.

“We designed it with the community in mind, to connect community members, college students and high school students. We wanted something interactive and to provide all students the opportunity to present ideas and be judged by a live judging panel,” Lux said.

She described two different categories for the student pitch competition. One was for MCC’s students in management capstone courses. Lux said that the top winner in this category was Toni Foust of Warren.

“Her concept involved developing an app to help students navigate college by providing transportation, accessible transportation,” she said.

In the high school category, Chippewa Valley Schools’ high schools Dakota and Chippewa Valley High participated with teams of students.

“Many of the pitches were practical and could be implemented, and also very thoughtful, really on point and on target, impacting the problem they were asked to solve,” Lux said.

Chippewa Valley High School seniors Madi Stewart and Mia Apone won the top team award at the event. The larger Chippewa Valley High School team at the event included Stewart, Apone, Payton McDonald, Alayna Haag, Molly Wilczynski and Lauren Coury. This larger team earned the top school award at the event.

“All the students were presented with Rising Star trophies and a tuition award to apply to attending Macomb Community College,” Lux said. “We also had additional trophies designed for the winning high school teams.”

The students presented 60-second TikTok videos and responded to questions from judges in a two- or three-minute time period. Lux said Stewart and Apone’s presentation illustrated a concept for updated classroom technology and natural classroom lighting to create a more engaging environment.

“Their pitch was very engaging, they did a good job with the quality of their answers to questions from judges. They were professional and prepared, and able to answer specific questions to support their information,” Lux said.

Stewart stated she and Apone became involved in the project during their Leadership Class. They started by brainstorming for a main idea for the entire project, and moved on to research from there. They also did interviews and created surveys to get data to work with. Updating classrooms was something that stood out as an area colleges could improve on, as this is where students spend the majority of their time.

“As students we have not been to college, but we thought about what we noticed when we visited colleges over the summer,” Stewart said.

Natural lighting, an open concept, more comfortable seating, and greater access to technology such as iPads for all students were key points of Stewart and Apone’s presentation.

“We wanted to do something we really thought would modernize the classroom, that we felt passionate about,” Apone said.

Students who attended Macomb Innovates! – College Reimagined also had an opportunity to check out interactive demonstrations featuring Macomb Makerspace and other innovative areas. They also had a chance to win door prizes.