



Empowering teens through
entrepreneurship, employment and education.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PAINESVILLE STUDENT SAMARIE GASTON TO COMPETE AT THE 2011 NFTE NATIONAL YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP CHALLENGE

Cleveland, OH – September 21, 2011 – Samarie Gaston, a senior at Painesville Harvey High School, won the 2011 City-Wide Business Plan Competition and the right to represent Northeast Ohio in the NFTE National Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge, presented by MasterCard Worldwide, in association with Kathryn W. Davis, in New York City on Thursday, October 6th.

The finalists represent 30 businesses, all of whom participated in the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE)'s program that teaches young people to seize educational opportunities and start businesses, were first and second place winners of their Regional Business Plan Competitions, and have moved on to the finals to compete for seed capital.

"We are very pleased with the drive, passion and creativity of this year's participants in the national competition," said Steve Mariotti, Founder of NFTE. "These young entrepreneurs are proof that economic hardships are no obstacle to becoming what you want to be in life and that taking ownership of yourself is empowering. And thanks to the support of sponsors like MasterCard Worldwide, Kathryn W. Davis, and E*TRADE, we are excited to have the opportunity to recognize so many amazing young entrepreneurs from around the country."

Finalists were required to develop and present original business plans as part of their entrepreneurial studies at school based on curriculum created by NFTE. As part of their coursework, NFTE students receive hands-on training in launching a business and learn the real-world relevance of math, reading and writing to their businesses. NFTE studies reinforce students' critical thinking skills and provide them with tools to help them control their futures and avoid the lure of the streets.

The 2011 NFTE National Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge grand-prize winner will take home \$10,000, with the runner-up winning \$5,000 and the second runner-up winning \$3,500. All three winners will also receive two round-trip tickets on Southwest Airlines and a laptop computer donated by Samsung. The grand-prize winner will also receive a \$5,000 Coleman Entrepreneurial Scholarship, sponsored by GlobalHue.

Finalists also filmed an elevator pitch video as part of the NFTE Online Elevator Pitch Challenge, presented by E*TRADE Bank. To nominate the best elevator pitch, voters can visit www.elevatorpitch2011.com until October 4. The winner of the pitch challenge will receive \$2,500 on the evening of the National Challenge with two runners-up receiving \$500 each.

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NFTE CHALLENGE CONT.

Samarie's business is **Sweet, Sweet Chocolate**, affordable homemade chocolate covered pretzels. She offers three products - pretzel rods, mini bags, and bonus bags of broken pretzels. Her target market is Lake County, where she has participated in "Girls Time Out" at Quail Hollow Resort in Concord and various community fairs. Her delicious pretzels are on consignment at Jennifer & Company Beauty Salon and Seekers Coffee Shop.

Samarie plans continue to grow her business while she graduates from Harvey High School and pursues a four-year college degree. Thanks to the First Congregational Church in Painesville, Samarie has an FDA-approved kitchen in which to prepare her pretzels, and the space is donated. This partnership is a great way the community has stepped up to encourage this young entrepreneur.

Carol Rivchun, President of Youth Opportunities, is very proud of Samarie. "She was up against tough competition but won because she has an excellent business and is articulate in presenting her business plan."

"The NFTE program provides teens with tools to find their own path to success," said Amy Rosen President and CEO of NFTE. "NFTE encourages students to pursue their interests in an entrepreneurial fashion, and the program also helps to close our nation's achievement gap among inner-city youth. We are so pleased for all of our finalists and look forward to seeing them become the future owners of businesses around the country."

About the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship

Too many young people today drop out of school and struggle to break the cycle of poverty. Since 1987, the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) has been inspiring young people to pursue educational opportunities, start their own businesses, and succeed in life. By providing entrepreneurship education programs relevant to the real world, NFTE empowers students to own their educations in and out of the classroom and to find their own path to success. Hundreds of thousands of students have discovered opportunity all around them through entrepreneurship via thousands of certified educators worldwide. NFTE supports active programs in 18 U.S. states and 10 countries around the world through our network of program offices and licensed partners. Entrepreneurs are a powerful driver of economic growth and NFTE sows the seeds of innovation in students worldwide. For more information, visit www.nfte.com.

About MasterCard Worldwide

MasterCard (NYSE: MA) is a global payments and technology company. It operates the world's fastest payments processing network, connecting consumers, financial institutions, merchants, governments and businesses in more than 210 countries and territories. MasterCard's products and solutions make everyday commerce activities—such as shopping, traveling, running a business and managing finances - easier, more secure and more efficient for everyone. Learn more at mastercard.com or follow us on Twitter @mastercardnews.

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NFTE CHALLENGE CONT.

About Southwest Airlines

Southwest Airlines, the Official Domestic Airline of the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, is pleased to present the winners of the NFTE National Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge and the winner of the Online Elevator Pitch Challenge with two round-trip tickets on Southwest Airlines to enhance his or her business through travel. Stop searching for low fares and start traveling! Go to southwest.com – the only place to find all of Southwest Airlines' low fares to the places you love!

About Youth Opportunities Unlimited

Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Y.O.U.), a youth workforce development organization founded in 1982, has provided more than 160,000 youth, ages 14 to 19, with workforce preparation skills and entrepreneurship training. In 2011, Y.O.U. will serve 1,500 teens and 300 employers in Northeast Ohio with programs and goals developed in partnership with school districts, employers, government agencies, and other non-profits. Y.O.U.'s in-school and after-school programs empower youth to succeed in school, in the workplace, and in life.

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