

The Miami Herald

NEIGHBORS

April 27, 2009

Circulation: 210,884

NORTH MIAMI BEACH HIGH SCHOOL

North Miami Beach High students learn about entrepreneurial skills

WITH THE HELP OF A PROGRAM RUN BY COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE WOMEN, A GROUP OF YOUNG GIRLS FROM NORTH MIAMI BEACH HIGH LEARNED THE ROPES OF THE BUSINESS WORLD



Freddy Alvernia, operations manager for Mary Brickell Village, shows an unfinished unit to students from North Miami Beach Senior High's Girls Educated and Motivated for Success organization. The field trip was part of an after school real estate mentoring program sponsored by the Commercial Real Estate Women Foundation.

DANIEL BOCK / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

BY PAMELA DUQUE

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For Rachel Desert, a junior at North Miami Beach High, learning the skills to become an entrepreneur deserves a new addition to the English language.

"It's funducational," said Rachel, 17, explaining a program that teaches young women commercial real estate skills was fun and educational.

She is one of 35 teenagers from North Miami Beach who make up Girls Educated and Motivated for Success (GEMS), an all-female student club.

This year, the club took part in a program created to help instill skills such as creating a business plan, opening a new store and learning about commercial real estate.

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The program is run by Commercial Real Estate Women, which brings together professionals to promote and educate people about opportunities in Miami-Dade County.

Each year, the group selects a high school to take part in CREW Careers: Building Opportunities, requiring students to attend weekly sessions after school.

"I really like CREW and their program because they stepped out of the norm and opened our eyes to what's out there other than being a doctor or a nurse," said junior Paige Campbell, 17.

The program ended last month with a visit to Mary Brickell Village, where the girls met with the plaza's general manager and toured stores in various stages of completion.

"We thought it would be a great idea to open our doors to the girls of North Miami Beach High and give them an idea of how the construction of a new store goes," said Fernando Perez, Mary Brickell Village's general manager. "We showed them different trades that exist in building, developing and managing retail property."

The six-week program is geared toward girls but is open to both genders.

"Real estate isn't just about selling a home," said Diane Fass, CREW Careers' committee co-chairwoman. "There is a lawyer, a property manager, a construction worker, etc. It's multi-faceted."

Rachel, who is also GEMS vice president, has been a club member for the past two years. She called her school group a "sisterhood club" and said their interaction with professional women has opened her eyes to opportunities after high school.

"We're a big team and we count on each other," Rachel said. "We have fun, laugh together, and we have the opportunity of becoming professionals."

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In a struggling economy, CREW encouraged the girls to stay motivated and break through gender barriers.

"I want them to know that a woman can do it," said Fass, also a project manager with Turner Construction and 10-year veteran of the real estate business. "Commercial real estate is traditionally a man's world, and we want them to know that they don't have to be afraid to enter it."

For senior Sandy Durosier, 17, the experience has meant more than just an after-school activity.

"I've learned that education opens a lot of doors," she said. "I now want to make it and succeed."