

Entrepreneurs empower BCC students

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By PHIL DEVITT

Fall River Spirit Editor

Caleb Fiero tattooed grapefruits first to see if his artwork would look good on something other than a traditional canvas. It did. Now he's one year into painting permanent pictures on human skin. But he's not getting paid — not yet, at least — and that's by choice.

"I haven't earned the right to charge," he said. "I need to get as many under my belt as I can before I do that."

Fiero, 29, an apprentice at Fall River's Ink Clinic, said it is more important to gain experience and build a good reputation than it is to make money from the start. He said he supports himself with other work while pursuing his dream on the side.

Fiero was one of dozens of business people who gave advice to students at Bristol Community College's Entrepreneurship Day last week. For four hours, he happily shared his story with anyone who approached his booth, whether they had a question or just wanted to more closely admire some of the paintings he had on display.

"I have made so many mistakes, they're impossible to count," he told a group of students as they scribbled his answer in notebooks. "But every time I fell on my face and nearly broke it, I had the opportunity to get back up."

Fiero, a graduate of Seekonk High School and BCC, said he spent 10 years giving away his paintings, something his peers couldn't always understand.

"That's how I promoted myself," he said. "I'd see these other people, seniors in college, so mad and upset that no one was buying their paintings. If you don't have experience, why would you expect people to buy your work?"

"The worst thing would be to have somebody walk away wishing they could afford my artwork. It's way more important to me that they walk away with a smile on their face, excited and wanting more. Everyone has a right to art."

Hundreds of students and staffers jammed the Commonwealth College Center, meeting small business owners from all walks of life. A professional videographer, a massage therapist and a woman who walks on broken glass were a few of the people on hand for one-on-one conversation.

"I always say that if you can do it on glass, you can do it in life," said Kerry Cudmore of Life and Business Coaching. "I hear a lot of people say, 'You're crazy.' But I just focus on what's happening on the bottom of my feet. I'm not paying attention to the crowd, just what I'm doing. It's about 100

percent focus."

Minutes later, a barefoot Cudmore carefully stepped across several feet of glass as people watched in amazement. A life coach for 12 years, Cudmore, of Westport, said she uses glass- and fire-walking, board- and arrow-breaking and steel bar-bending to empower business leaders.

Between swings at a mini-golf station, Jim Nichols told students to persevere when the going gets tough.

"I was asked about how I got started and my answer was by exploration, by what I thought would work in a New England market," said the owner of Oceans 18, a glow-in-the-dark mini-golf facility on Kings Highway in New Bedford. "A lot of people said I shouldn't try, but I forged through it. I overcame all sorts of roadblocks."

Oceans 18 has been open for six years. Prior to starting the business, Nichols was a manager at the Dartmouth Mall JC Penney.

"I was walking outside the mall one day when it occurred to me that there was an 11,000-square-foot space available inside that had been vacant for four years. It clicked with me that this is New England, the weather is so unpredictable, and maybe an inside facility would be successful."

The mall location didn't work out, but Nichols said he found equally good space off a busy New Bedford street near stores and a movie theater. Business is strong, Nichols said, and more people discover the facility every day. The business is open seven days a week, according to its website.

"(Students) asked me, 'How did you do it?' You know what? I don't know," Nichols said with a laugh. "Really, it's about pulling all the pieces together. You've got to keep pressing forward."

The BCC Academic Center for Entrepreneurship (ACE) is a small business resource center guiding small and micro-business owners towards their goals of starting and running a successful and productive enterprise. More information is available by calling (508) 678-2811, ext. 2695, or by visiting www.bristolcc.edu.