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In Norwalk, Westport, Wilton

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**NORWALK**

SERVING THE COMMUNITY



Kathleen O'Rourke/Staff photos

**Gavin Nelson, 11, of Norwalk, works on his cairns yesterday for his 'Marketplace' project at Montessori Middle School in Norwalk. A fan of the outdoors, Gavin is making the sculptures out of rocks collected on a family trip to Maine this summer.**

By Alexandra Fenwick  
Staff Writer

NORWALK — Future business leaders of America were busy developing the next hot items to hit the market yesterday, but they weren't brainstorming in Silicon Valley boardrooms and they weren't working the phones on Wall Street.

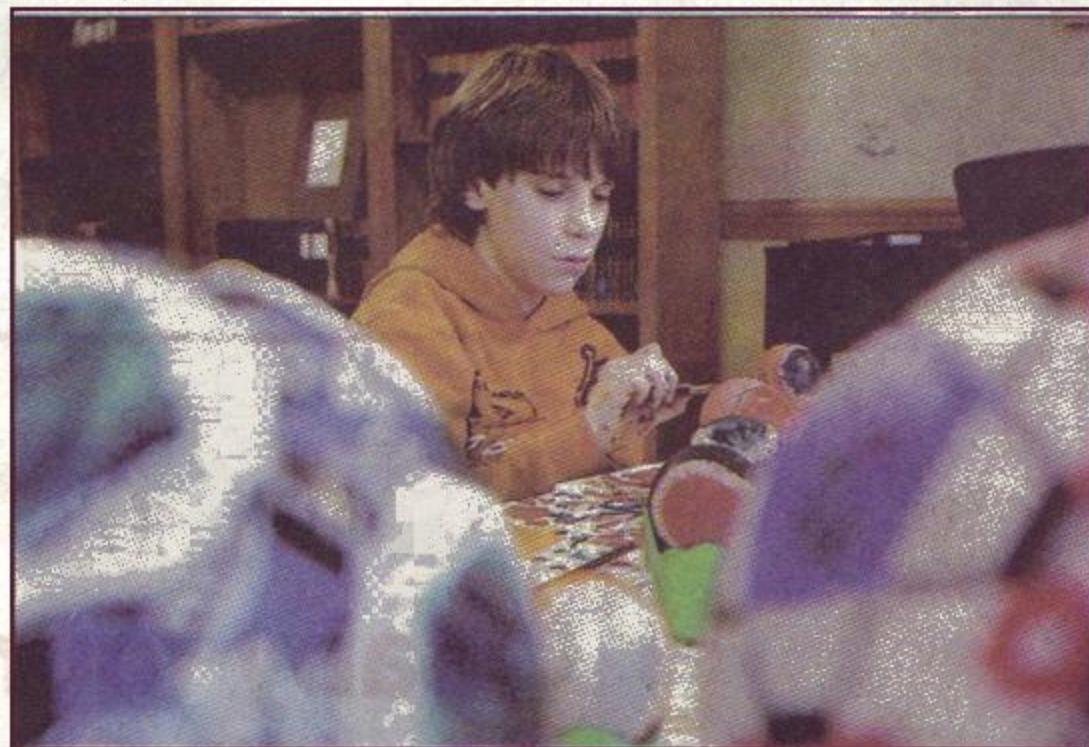
They were gluing, painting and sewing in the classrooms of Montessori Middle School in Norwalk.

The independent school's 22 seventh- and eighth-graders are learning how to run a small business as part of an economics class. The young entrepreneurs must come up with a business plan for a marketable product and craft the items themselves while keeping track of expenses. They then sell the items at the school's annual "Marketplace" fundraiser in February.

All the money earned is managed by two designated

## Turning a profit

*Montessori students try their hands at entrepreneurship*



**John Silvester, 11, of Norwalk, paints a baseball.**

student bankers and goes toward charity and the school's 10-day year-end camping trip to Moab, Utah. Last year, the students made a profit of \$6,800.

Meanwhile, students learn to budget their funds, write checks, keep a ledger and turn a profit while gaining an appreciation for the value of a dollar. They also learn business terms and write research reports on successful real-world companies like Google.com, whose Montessori-educated founders have credited the educational philosophy with teaching them to be self-starters.

Established in 2004, the middle school is an offshoot of the 43-year-old elementary-level Montessori School on Whipple Road in Wilton and is attended by children from Fairfield, Bridgeport, Norwalk, New Canaan, Greenwich, Wilton, Weston, Westport and Easton. Its students  
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# Business

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dents are a mix of longtime Montessori pupils and previous public, parochial and independent-schoolers.

Teacher and middle school head Ramani De Alwis developed the Marketplace project in keeping with the Montessori hands-on teaching method and philosophy of fostering self-direction.

"It's a fantastic example of something in Montessori that we call extension, where you take an academic focus and enrich it by applying it to real life outside the classroom," school director Mary Zeman said.

The project's most important lesson is simple: "The sky's the limit," De Alwis said.

Outdoor enthusiasts Gavin Nelson and his twin sister Kate, 11, are making candleholders and decorative cairn sculptures out of smooth rocks they collected on a family trip to Maine this summer. Cairns are mounds of rocks piled by hikers to mark trails.

The twins attended Norwalk's Marvin Elementary School be-

## Place for profits

■ All the money earned goes toward charity and the school's 10-day year-end camping trip to Utah.

fore starting at the Montessori school. Gavin said they thought the project made good business sense because it didn't involve much overhead.

"You can find the rocks easily and we didn't have to buy anything," he said.

Kathleen Kranzlin, 12, sculpted clay-framed mirrors that will eventually be fired in a kiln and glazed in bright colors. The New Canaan girl, who has attended Montessori schools since age 3, said the project was more labor-intensive than she first imagined.

"It's a little harder than I thought," she said. "I didn't realize it would take so long to fire them."

Students often hit bumps along the way but learn to modify their plans accordingly, De Alwis said.

"Making a few is better than giving up on something you

thought you could do," she said.

Samantha Tesluk, was busy making quilted purses at her sewing machine yesterday. The 12-year-old aspiring fashion designer said she has gotten good buzz on her designs and hopes to sell them to local boutiques.

Quality control is a big part of her business plan.

"When you're making it, it has to be really perfect. If a thread or seam is out of place, you have to take it out," Samantha said. "I sewed the lining in backward on one purse and had to take it all out. It was so frustrating, but then I got the hang of it."

Other projects included hand-carved pinewood derby cars by Tom Kitt, 12, a former student at Eastern Middle School in Greenwich, homemade soap and soapdishes created by longtime Montessori student Jon Luse, 12, of Wilton, and fabric-lined jewelry boxes by Shellyann Lindo, 13, of Norwalk, a first-year Montessori student.

Of course, many of the students aren't new to the business world.

Business-savvy students and

project partners John Silvester, 11, a former public school student from Norwalk, and Andrew Allison-Godfrey, 12, a lifelong Montessori student from Westport, first earned their business stripes hawking lemonade. They are now putting that knowledge to use in their class project, selling handpainted baseballs and soccer balls.

Andrew shopped all over for the best deal on baseballs before he found a dozen for \$10 at Sports Authority. The pair plan to price the baseballs at about \$7 each and will offer free painted Wiffle ball sets as an incentive for customers who buy two products or more.

The business partners said the bulk rate deal is a strategy not all that different from what is — for their money — one of the best business models on the market today: Costco, the subject of Andrew's written research report.

"There's a lot of cool things and it's cheap," Andrew said.

The chain's \$1.49 hot dog and soft drink deal isn't a bad idea either, they agreed.

"The hot dogs are really good," John said.