

Sun Crest Call, St. Louis, MO
Thursday, Nov. 28, 2002

OAKVILLE STUDENTS OPERATE VIRTUAL BUSINESSES

Marketing students at Oakville Senior High School are competing head to head with students from across the country without ever having to leave their classroom.

Taking advantage of computer technology and the worldwide web, Oakville students are managing their own businesses as part of the DECA Virtual Business Challenge that will end in April.

Using business-simulation software, the students are given complete responsibility and decision-making authority for managing a retail convenience store. Just like real business owners, students must deal with a variety of challenges, including developing marketing strategies and battling competitive threats.

Unlike traditional textbooks, simulation software captures the students' attention by pulling them into a virtual reality where they make the decisions and instantly see the results of their work.

Forty-six students from Oakville Senior High's marketing and entrepreneurship classes, taught by Michael Howard, are among more than 1,600 teams participating in the national contest.

"Today's high school students have grown up in a video-oriented world and business-simulation software is an excellent way to reach them," Howard stated in a news release. "In spite of their limited experience with the software, I'm really proud of what the students have accomplished so far."

The contest involves four phases and Oakville placed five teams in Missouri's top 30 during phase one.

Each additional phase increases the management responsibility for the student owners in the areas of merchandising, staffing, purchasing, pricing and promotion.

The contest will end with a 32-team, round-robin tournament in Orlando, Fla., where students compete head to head in a live, winner take all competition. Just like in real business, profits are used to determine the winners.

"It's fun to see the kids get excited about running their own business. They may not know it, but they're learning quite a bit about marketing and entrepreneurship while having fun at the same time," Howard said.