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■ ADVERTORIAL PROFILE

Junior Achievement

Creating a new generation of entrepreneurs and business leaders in B.C.

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British Columbia, quite literally, means business. According to the latest figures from BCStats, approximately 395,000 small businesses were operating in the province in 2009, accounting for over 1 million jobs or 57% of private-sector employment – the highest rate in the country.

“Small business is responsible for 98% of all business in B.C.; it is obviously a very large and solid economic factor for all of us,” confirms Jan Bell-Irving, president of Junior Achievement BC (JABC), a not-for-profit organization. “That is why it is so important to make sure that young people in this province receive the education they need in the areas that count in order to plant the seeds of transformational success now.”

But according to a new 2011 report prepared independently by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) entitled *Making An Impact*, which measures Junior Achievement Canada’s role, impact and reach, “There is an absence of sufficient business and basic financial literacy skills education in Canada’s primary and secondary school systems.”

Fortunately, JA has been committed to closing that gap since 1955, offering its highly engaging brand of educational programs in the areas of work-readiness, entrepreneurship and financial literacy to youth in elementary, middle and high schools across the country.

“In Canada, Junior Achievement reaches over 230,000 students with over 1.4 million hours of instructional hours annually,” reveals BCG, which also “attributes \$425 million per year in Canada to direct entrepreneurial activity by Achievers.”

“Those are tangible numbers that show a staggeringly real impact, about which we can be very proud,” says Bell-Irving, adding that approximately 30,000 students are specifically benefiting from JABC on an annual basis.

“Beyond this exciting, new data confirming to our donors, volunteers, parents, teachers and students that our efforts and investments are truly yielding terrific results, what we want to do is to reach out further, to an



Junior Achievement of BC (JABC) manager of marketing and communications Christopher Hindle (left) with Paradise Coffee owner Massimo Mandarino. According to Mandarino, a former Junior Achiever, JABC gave him some of the real-world business skills needed to become an entrepreneur.

even more diverse group of students,” she says. “Our primary goal is to reach the kids who are experiencing the biggest gap in skill development, whether in urban cores or the rural heartland, from corner-to-corner of the province.”

JABC’s current reach is impressive. Of the 1,092 programs delivered to students in B.C. during the 2010-11 school year, Bell-Irving says that over 50% were conducted outside of the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley hubs.

“Currently we are engaged in 49 of the 60 school districts provincially,” she says. “At this point it is so important to both maintain and extend our reach, so that potentially all B.C. kids could benefit from our programs.”

Among JABC’s unique offerings: Our Business World, which lets elementary students experience making big decisions in different areas of a small manufacturing operation and

Dollars with Sense, which gives junior high school students the personal money management skills that they need in order to make better economic decisions.

These and other programs, says Bell-Irving, can only be coordinated and conducted with JABC’s roster of over 750 volunteer mentors – B.C. businesspeople dedicated to delivering the organization’s programs in provincial classrooms, and transforming the key concepts of its lessons into a message that empowers and inspires.

“Our mentors are integral to the children’s success,” she says. “We put a mentor in front of youth and they can usually get through to them where their parents possibly cannot.”

Who better to attest to this than a former Achiever? In 1995, Massimo Mandarino participated in JABC’s signature Company Program, which inspires high school students to understand the role of business

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in our society by creating an enterprise of their own in collaboration with a professional business consultant.

Back then, says Mandarino, who attended Centennial High School in Coquitlam, the 12-week program was known as Project Business, and his volunteer advisor was a man named Doug Morneau.

“My classmates decided to run a coffee cart in the school,

and I remember Mr. Morneau explaining to us all aspects of how to promote the business, how to market it and how to finance it,” Mandarino recalls. “A lot of it was new to me, and it helped to hear it coming from someone who was actually running a real business in the real world.”

When asked about his work as a volunteer mentor, Morneau, a seasoned businessman who heads up Rhino Marketing Inc. in Port Coquitlam, remembers, “The tough part was stepping back and letting the kids figure it out as they came across different obstacles.”

Mandarino and his classmates, Morneau explains, “came up against some resistance to their idea from the school cafeteria, to which I said, ‘Hey, welcome to your first labour dispute.’ Then, when they discovered there was a problem with getting electricity to their cart, they came up with a plan to use propane instead. They were really thinking on their own and using some real-world business skills to solve problems.”

Years later, mentor and student were serendipitously reunited at a charity event in Coquitlam. By then, Mandarino, who learned from Morneau that “business is a rocky road – you need persistence and common sense to get over the rough patches and not give up,” had launched his own micro-roasting company, Paradise Coffee.

“I was surprised that he remembered me,” says Mandarino of the chance encounter. “I told him that I am self-employed and that he had really made an impression upon me as a business mentor, in high school. Now, he’s one of my clients.”

“Massimo did a great job coming in and presenting his pitch to us, and Paradise is now the coffee supplier for our office,” Morneau confirms. “It is a real bonus for me that I was able to reconnect with one of the students from that classroom after so many years. It was great to work with the kids, to meet them and find out what their perception of business is, and now to see one of them successfully running their own business – it is extremely gratifying. It shows and proves to me that what JABC has done and continues to do in B.C. is really making a positive difference.” ■