What is Roundup Technology?

Roundup Technology is a student-run media business housed in a public high school in Mosquero, New Mexico. Students participating in the program offer community members services such as DVD and CD production, photo duplication and restoration, graphics, photo pins and gifts, and media assistance. In the process, students gain experience operating a small business, develop leadership and entrepreneurial skills, and explore creative and tangible ways to contribute to their home community.

How did Roundup Technology get started?

The story of Roundup Technology is really about the process of engaging and empowering high school students. Mosquero, (population 695), is a small town in a rural Harding County, New Mexico. As is true for many rural communities, the local high school is an essential component of the economic and social health of the community.

In 2002, Donna Hazen was hired as a teacher in Mosquero’s public school. Before teaching in Mosquero, Hazen founded a program that combined language arts education with the collection and telling of local family histories. She brought this concept to her classroom, and she and her students began what would become “Familias de Nuevo Mexico,” (Families of New Mexico), an continuing annual storytelling project. Each year, a local family is selected, elders from that family are interviewed, and students create print and digital products to document the collected stories. In addition, students produce and perform a play for the community based on the stories told to them by that year’s honored community elders.

Impressed by student initiative and creativity, a parent with experience in journalism suggested starting a community newspaper produced by Mosquero students. The parent and Hazen provided early mentoring and guidance, but the newspaper, The Harding County Roundup, quickly became a project overseen and produced entirely by students. Printed quarterly, the paper is eagerly anticipated and enjoyed by the community.

A local family-owned business had supported the school for several years by writing grants to purchase computers for student use. Fueled by their developing skill with computer applications, the students began to find ways to add sophistication and quality to the annual “Familias de Nuevo Mexico” project and to the Roundup.

In 2004, a family member honored by that year’s “Familias” project was so impressed by the students’ efforts that she helped put together an application for a
grant offered by the Microsoft Corporation. Out of a field of 79 schools, Mosquero was one of four schools in New Mexico to be selected as a “Partners in Learning” institution, resulting in a three-year partnership with a mentor from Microsoft and a grant of $125,000.

Most of the grant monies were used to upgrade the school’s technology infrastructure, but Hazen wanted to do something more to capitalize on the skills and potential of her students. Driven largely by student interest and commitment, Hazen helped organize and equip a media business housed in the school: “Roundup Technology” offers DVD and CD production, photo duplication and restoration, graphics, photo pins and gifts, and media assistance. Such services would not otherwise be available in a small town like Mosquero, and the business offers employment and entrepreneurial development for participating students.

Beyond providing opportunities for students to develop their work ethic and sense of personal responsibility, Hazen is eager to promote positive civic engagement and build opportunities that forge strong connections between the students and their home community. Mosquero’s small downtown looked dated, so in 2009, Hazen initiated conversation between interested students and a muralist about beautifying area storefronts. The muralist provided instruction and mentoring to two students who were particularly excited about the project, and they began transforming the look of Mosquero’s downtown. The project received a ten thousand dollar grant from the New Mexico Public Education Department’s Rural Revitalization Division, along with donations from community members and businesses, including revenue from Roundup Technology. So far, eight buildings have been repainted and decorated. Additional buildings have been selected to receive a makeover as well, and a crew of students is in the process of making repairs and prepping them for new paint.

Before
The vision for the unique and evolving experiences available to students in Mosquero is particularly embodied in the Roundup Technology program. In 2010 Mosquero was one of 16 schools nationwide to be honored with an award for “Re-designing the High School Experience.” In addition, enrollment in the Mosquero K-12 public school has increased to 48 students, up from 36 students a year ago. Teacher Donna Hazen is quick to credit the success and effectiveness of the program to the significant buy-in of the students: “Students owning their projects and creating their own ideas is the magic of Roundup Technology,” says Hazen. “Most adults forget that the students have a wealth of energy, knowledge, and a huge desire to be trusted and treated like an adult. After all, they are at the edge of adulthood and they need to be allowed the freedom and trust to try their ideas.”

The day-to-day operation of Roundup Technology as well as the evolving range of services provided by the business is guided almost exclusively by the students. As a result of participation, students display an increase in self-motivation, responsibility, and ability to work with independence and confidence. “Roundup Technology students are entrepreneurs,” says Hazen, “and they have learned that they can create jobs when they assess what the community’s demands and needs are, seek supporters, create, and then produce a quality product. They aren’t scared
try new things.”

The Process: Keys to Success

Several factors contributed to the ongoing success of the Roundup Technology project.

- Students are invited to bring their interests and creativity to the table. “Allow the students to brainstorm ideas, let them be the leaders and innovators. Treat them like adults and with the utmost respect and watch them get things done,” Hazen insists. “My students research resources, they contact tech support, order their supplies, requisition the amount needed, work with the business office and superintendent as if they were teachers, they check on payment options, etc.”

- Engaged adult allies in the community continue to provide support through energy, resources and expertise.

- The extra legwork of applying for outside funding was essential in funding the student’s ideas. Yet Hazen and the students at Mosquero didn’t lose sight of the resources and generosity within their own community, and continue to solicit donations and support from local businesses and individuals.

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