

# Junior Achievement makes business world interesting

It's never too early to start learning about business, especially if someone can make it interesting.

Junior Achievement Hungary, a nonprofit foundation present in more than 200 elementary and high schools in Hungary, has as its goal to teach basic economic terms to elementary and secondary school children using materials that make it appealing.

"This is like language acquisition," said Zoltán Valcsicsák, community affairs manager at Levi Strauss Europe, the foundation's biggest supporter. "The younger you are, the more susceptible and open to the new you are."

To ensure student interest and up-to-date teaching materials, business people are invited to visit classrooms and pass on their experiences, both in classes and annual summer camps. Companies including 3M Hungary Trade Kft, Westel 900 GSM Rt, MOL Rt, Compack-Douwe Egberts Rt, Budapest Bank Rt and Citibank Rt, as well as the American Chamber of Commerce and Soros Foundation have sent representatives to participate. Their combined support for the foundation last year was some Ft 20 million (\$92,000) in financial and Ft 20 million of in-kind support.

"We want to show children that business-people are humans as well," said Iván Jávorszki, the foundation's manager. "Bringing them together has a positive effect on both parties."

Bert O'Donoghue, the executive director at 3M, and Valcsicsák both said that a combination of in-kind and financial support is proving very effective, as is letting senior managers talk about business to youngsters.

## PRO BONO

Denis Mohorović



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BERT O'DONOGHUE, 3M HUNGARY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"When we visit the kids, it's not a real lecture, it's a two-way communication," Valcsicsák said. "They can and do ask tough questions. Oftentimes, we learn as much as they do. It's good to know what they think about us."

In recognition of the foundation's efforts, two years ago the then Ministry of Culture and Education offered the business course a two-year elective for high school students.

"I was lucky to have mentors who introduced me to the business world early," O'Donoghue said. "But what about those children whose parents don't come from the busi-

ness community? From whom would they find out? This program helps them decide what they would like to do, not just drift between options."

Founded five years ago, the foundation is an offshoot of the U.S.-based Junior Achievement that uses teaching material devised by Princeton University in New Jersey. However, the Hungarian foundation has gone to great lengths to adapt teaching material to local needs, full of local, up-to-date case studies, O'Donoghue said. The Budapest Economics University and teachers participating in the program have so far generated seven different course books and materials, with plans to further increase the curriculum.

"This is an excellent preparatory course for economics," said Valéria Gyuris, economics and accounting teacher at the Vasvári Pál Secondary School in Szeged, which specializes in economics training. "It gives students just the right mix of theory and practice for their level."

The program has been running in the school for four years, available to 10th grade students, and the school plans to continue running the program in the future as well.

"We already have a lot of first-year students asking about the program," Gyuris said. "They like it and the response in general has been very good."

Erika Rapcsák, 18, a student at the Radnóti Miklós High School, also in Szeged, said she likes the program and the unusual way it approaches the subject, making it much more interesting than the usual, dry curriculum. Rapcsák plans to enroll at the Budapest Economics University this fall.

To ensure that teachers bring the maximum out of the material and children, the foundation organizes three training and re-training courses each year, usually a three-day event in the town of Esztergom, 45 kilometers north of Budapest.

"I don't think you can overemphasize the importance of the right approach to teaching something as difficult as economics," Jávorszki said. "If the teachers are good, the learning is fun."

Besides the 200 teachers who are working with the business curriculum, Junior Achievement Hungary employs a staff of seven, giving it with a small corporate structure that is running a huge number of projects, said O'Donoghue, who is also a member of the foundation's board. 3M joined the project two years ago.

"Supporting the foundation's work is a purely selfish gesture," he said. "Since all of our employees here are Hungarians, improving business education will give us a good labor force in the future."

Levi Strauss has been the foundation's biggest supporter from the beginning, donating some Ft 5.2 million (\$24,000) last year, and a total of more than Ft 250 million since 1992.

"We started supporting it back then because we wanted to help the birth of democracy and market economy," Valcsicsák said. "These young generations have to learn how to assert their rights in every sense. The foundation helps them in learning how to do it."

Some 60-80 new schools have already expressed their interest in the program to the foundation, wishing to join for the next school year.