MAKING THE PITCH

Entrepreneurial hopefuls present plans to panel

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LAWRENCE – Laid-off software engineer Bill Wormack, 58, of Chelmsford captivated a panel of two bankers and a business counselor as he wove his plan for a storytelling business he would call Words by Wormack.

Then there was chef Maria Julia Lichtman, 23, who plans to open a restaurant called Tribes on Broadway.

The idea grew from her fascination with the 12 tribes of Israel, she said. In that spirit, she would offer 12 cuisines from Caribbean to American, Columbian to Peruvian, Japanese to French and beyond.

Lichtman and Warmack are just two of the 34 people who took part in Northern Essex Community College's entrepreneurial training program this fall.

The program has received money from the U.S. Department of Labor under the Workforce Investment Act and is sponsored by the state Division of Career Services and the Workforce Development and Business and Technology departments. Those who are considered "dislocated workers" can attend the program for free.

It's a 20-week course that trains budding entrepreneurs in the basics of how to run a business.

Yesterday, participants presented their plans to a panel at the ValleyWorks Career Center in Lawrence.

Some people planned to offer tea parties to children and adults. Others were looking to go into fashion design.

Some of those who passed their business cards around were Julie A. Wolowitz of Methuen, who plans to start a company called Mediterranean Imports and M. Brenda Smith of Newburyport. She wrote for the Eagle-Tribune for 15 years and has started her own editorial services consulting firm, WriteSmith.

"These are things you don't learn in business school," Smith said of the course.

Warmack and Lichtman not only spoke about their love of writing stories and cooking respectively, but also their revenue forecasts, markets, competitors, projected sales and boards of advisors.

Their plans were presented to fellow students and their instructor, business consultant Paul Jermain of Manchester-by-the-Sea who runs Jermain & Company, as well as the panel. That group was made up of Gordon Corzine, a business counselor at Salem State College in Salem, Mass; Paula Alves Zaiken, vice president, relationship manager for Bank of America; and Jim Warren, a vice president of Sovereign Bank.

"It's a great combination of your peers, teaching and some real-life business people," Warren said.

The business experts had some advice for Lichtman, a graduate of Lawrence High School who holds a culinary arts degree and Warmack, who worked for Verizon Information Services in Middleton as a software engineer for 20 years before company layoffs last year.

He had experience telling stories for the past decade and has performed voiceover work. When he ran out of stories he wanted to tell, he began writing his own material five years ago.

Under his home-based business plan, he hopes to net \$28,000 in the first year. He developed sales projections for his books and CDs, and plans to invest \$5,000 in the business.

Wormack could have used more eye contact when making his business pitch, said Corzoine, who worried about how the storyteller might protect his intellectual property rights. Because of Warmack's use of choreography and mime in his storytelling, Corzine suggested he make a DVD instead of an audio-only CD. Corzine questioned Warmack's financials.

"Your growth rate at 48 percent a year seemed very aggressive to me," he said.