

## *Exploring Asylum Hill* Junior Achievement of Southwest New England

Junior Achievement began in 1919 in Springfield MA as an organization dedicated to teaching youth about business, but it really began to grow in the 1940s after WWII. Today JA of Southwest New England, under the leadership of Lou Golden their CEO serves all of Connecticut except Fairfield County and last year they served 35,000 students. Their mission is to inspire and prepare young people to be successful in the global economy. They serve students from Kindergarten through Grade 12 mainly during the school day with a wide range of programs focusing on job readiness, financial literacy and entrepreneurship. One of their chief sponsors is The Hartford who is also their landlord at 70 Farmington Ave.

Lou spent many years rising up the corporate ladder at the Hartford Courant. Then in 2002 he decided to make a change and find something that he could do to “make a difference.” George Bahamonde, then the CEO of United Way, wanted Lou to get involved with Junior Achievement. Lou, like many people, thought it was just a program to get kids from the suburbs involved in business. He wanted something more like feeding the hungry. When he told George that, George said “with all due respect, you don’t know what you’re talking about.” It didn’t take Lou long to find out he was right.

It is commonly thought that Junior Achievement is all about helping teens in the suburbs to get into business, but actually the students that they work with are pretty much split 50/50 urban/suburban.

As Lou Golden, the CEO puts it, Junior Achievement is “the vehicle by which employees from The Hartford and the broader business community... can get engaged and help”

Junior Achievement doesn’t just supply teaching aids to the teachers, they bring volunteers in to the schools “so that the children don’t just get the information, they get role models” as Lou puts it.



Lou Golden, CEO with Jeremy Race, COO

“We do two very important things, we connect these kids, especially inner-city kids to adults they would never meet under any other circumstances... and we connect these adults to these kids.” “As much as we teach kids, we’re teaching adults”

And the curriculum, which correlated to the State Standards is professionally produced, fun and engaging. They do role-playing and create budgets for themselves, and in the process they discover possibilities for their lives they might not otherwise find.

The program is truly comprehensive. In kindergarten they begin with the difference between a need and a want. As the students mature, occupational choices, education, budgeting are all incorporated into the curriculum.

Last year more than 2500 volunteers went into the schools in the five counties that are served to work with the students. Some of them have come back several times even 10 or 12 times because they get so much out of it. There's so much more to discover about Junior Achievement that the only way you can really get to know it is to volunteer. You can reach them at 860-525-4510 or at <http://jaconn.org/about-ja/> more photos are available at <https://goo.gl/photos/M6uRj9KbnWsnHySSA>