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Isabel Yarborough | Owner, Flora + Wild



PHOTO: CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY

## YEA! A Head Start for Young Entrepreneurs

WRITTEN BY JAN WINDHORST

**ISABEL YARBOROUGH IS** only 18 years old, but she already has an award-winning business for which she received funding, and a solid plan for her future. At such a young age, how did she develop her vision and achieve goals that many adults still find elusive? One contributing factor was participation in the Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!) — an innovative afterschool program where students develop, build, and launch their own business or social enterprise. The nationally proven program offers mentorships and guidance from local business leaders, a dynamic and fun learning environment, and the opportunity for teens to earn real investments to start their business. The program is hosted in partnership with Southeastern Louisiana University and the Louisiana Small Business Development Center at Southeastern.

A Covington resident, Isabel is the owner of Flora + Wild, an online, indoor plant market. Her business plan was created and funded locally with the help of YEA! Northshore, and she was also chosen to present her enterprise at the YEA! national competition, much like the format of the TV show *Shark Tank*. Of her experience with the program she says, "The Young Entrepreneurs Academy has taught me many life skills along with business skills that I can implement for the rest of my life. I have found a career path now — what I want to do for the rest of my life."

The experience helps transform local middle and high school students into real, confident entrepreneurs. Through the program, students in grades 6-12 generate business ideas, conduct market research, write business plans, pitch to a panel of investors, and launch their own real enterprise. Graduates often cite valuable connections, newfound business knowledge, and increased overall confidence after completing the program. The nationally successful curriculum connects students with business mentors, provides exciting in and out-of-classroom experiences, and helps enact meaningful personal transformation in their lives.

YEA! Northshore was founded in 2015 by local business leader Mr. Shelby LaSalle and is one of over 150 chapters in partnership with YEA! National. Today, YEA! has partnerships with several large, significant organizations in the United States, including Southwest Airlines, The Kauffman Foundation, The Saunders Foundation, Sam's Club, The United States Chamber of Commerce, and many more. To date, more than 7,700 students have launched more than 5,100 operating businesses and non-profits.

While the program is open to boys and girls, YEA! Northshore Marketing Coordinator and Southeastern Marketing Instructor Elizabeth McDougal says she appreciates the head start afforded to female participants like Isabel. "Isabel is a perfect example of the advantage young people get from the experience, and I'm happy to recognize the success of young women to the readers of *Sophisticated Woman Magazine*." Isabel adds, "As a young, female entrepreneur, I have been blessed with an overwhelming sense of support and mentorship over this journey I've been on. Entrepreneurs are crazy dreamers, problem solvers, and risk takers. They stand up after falling and innovate when a challenge arises. To anyone who has a passion for entrepreneurship, YEA! is a great start to taking the leap." Elizabeth stresses that students don't need to have a specific business in mind to join the academy. Part of the process is helping students to fashion their vision whether it be for a profit or non-profit organization. Some additional young women owned businesses and organizations formed at YEA! include Lyndsie Smith's Rollin' with Art — a non-profit mobile art studio designed to make art classes accessible to more students; Maggie Tilyou's Technically Mine — a color-coded device that protects charging cords from fraying while identifying your charging cord and base; and Drew McKee's Harmony Skate Project — a non-profit skate competition that acts as a fundraiser to rehabilitate and beautify community parks.

Elizabeth explains that the program is project based and a blend of different classes and guest speakers where budding entrepreneurs connect with local professionals in key areas including accounting, graphic design, legal, and marketing. "Classes are held in Southeastern's technology lab where students do research and hash out a business plan that they'll present to real investors. We also go on field trips to several local businesses and work on the pitch presentations seeking seed money to launch. Each person who successfully completes their pitch gets some kind of investment."

The 2021 session will begin in the fall with registration slated for summer, but Elizabeth says it's not too early to begin planning to participate as slots fill up quickly. Each class is limited to 25 students to ensure individual attention and safe social distancing. Each accepted applicant receives a 50% reduction in tuition from generous sponsorships given by more than a dozen local businesses, with additional scholarships available based on need. To learn more about Isabel Yarborough, visit her website [floraandwild.com](http://floraandwild.com). For more information about the Young Entrepreneurs Academy, visit [yeaorthshore.org](http://yeaorthshore.org). 



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