

## VENTURE LLC & JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT Bringing Business Skills to School

This spring, freshmen Yuxin (Andrea) Guo and Robert Kaste shared their interest in business with a group of kindergartners at East Knox Elementary School. Guo and Kaste are volunteers with Junior Achievement of East Tennessee and members of Venture, a living-learning community at the Haslam College of Business. The pair traveled to the school to teach five weekly lessons on early money skills.

“It’s one of the most rewarding service experiences we’ll ever have because in a lot of ways, we’re the highlight of the day for these kids,” says Kaste. “At the same time, we’re teaching

them valuable skills that they’ll use in the future, and that’s very satisfying.”

Venture is an optional community for business students, creating built-in support and friendships. “We’re open to any student in the college granted that they’re first-time freshmen,” says Brian Francis, Venture director and assistant director in undergraduate programs. “This year, we have about 40 participants. They all live on the same floor in the same residence hall and take three classes in the fall and three in the spring together.”



One of Venture's goals is to encourage awareness of community needs and service. "One of the spring classes is our service learning class," Francis says. "We take time to define service leadership and talk about why it's such an effective way of leading, hitting on some of the human components of business."

The course emphasizes the impact students can make on a community. "We want them to understand that their service matters, whether as an individual or part of a company," Francis says. "It's a side of business that doesn't always get recognition but is very important."

Each student has a chance to apply those principles outside the classroom by participating in 20 hours of service with one of Venture's community partners.

## Community Connections

Since its inception a decade ago, Venture has worked with a range of campus and community organizations, including the University of Tennessee Cancer Institute, the Salvation Army, UT Recycles, and the Community Action Center. This year, their community partners are the Humane Society of the Tennessee Valley and Junior Achievement of East Tennessee. "One of Junior Achievement's goals is to educate elementary and intermediate students about basic business practices, specifically financial literacy," says Venture co-director Marg Basehart. "Several of our Venture students participated in Junior Achievement when they were in elementary school, and chose to volunteer this year because of that past experience."

For the Junior Achievement project, Venture students are put in pairs and connected with an area elementary school class. Then it's up to them to coordinate lesson times with the teacher, prepare the lessons, and teach the classes. "Junior Achievement gives us kits with comprehensive lesson plans and supplies, but the students still need to do some work ahead of time to prepare," Basehart says. "Each kit contains five lessons geared toward a particular grade level, from kindergarten to sixth grade." Near the end of the semester, Venture students give presentations in the service learning class on what they've gleaned from their experiences.



Opposite: Following a story about volunteering, Robert Kaste hands out classwork to Ms. Brown's Kindergarten class at East Knox County Elementary School. Above: Yuxin (Andrea) Guo helps students with a sequencing cut-and-paste activity.

## Positive Impacts

Whether through volunteering with Junior Achievement or another community partner, Venture students are expanding their vision of service. "When they arrive, they often think community service means building something or going to another country," Basehart says. "Instead, we want them to see that every community has a range of needs, and there are many ways to serve."

Connecting Haslam students to community needs makes a positive impact on both sides. A freshman in supply chain management, Kaste chose to serve with Junior Achievement because he already enjoyed working with kids as a swim instructor. "I figured this was right up my alley," he says, and he was right. "I love working with kindergartners. You can get them excited about just about anything."

Kaste finds the experience rewarding. "I feel like I'm making a difference in each kid's life, not just with the skills we're teaching them, but by providing a positive role model," he says. He's inspired to keep giving back by working with Junior Achievement in the future. "I want to expand my service efforts on campus," Kaste says. "I believe it's important to pay it forward to a community that's given so much to me, academically and socially."

An international student from China, Guo also chose to partner with Junior Achievement because of past experience working with children at her church. She appreciates the professional development she's gaining. "Teaching improves my public speaking and communication skills," she says. "It's a challenging, transforming experience." ■