

# Upcoming Trade Show Features 2024 Riverbend CEO Students Showcasing Businesses

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter  
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ALTON - Student-entrepreneurs in the Riverbend CEO program are preparing to showcase the hard work behind each of their businesses at their upcoming Trade Show, set for April 23, 2024, from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Best Western Premiere at 3559 College Ave. in Alton.

[The 2024 class of CEO students](#) will have an opportunity to take these businesses to the next level as they showcase their ideas and progress at the upcoming Trade Show. The show will feature tables for each of the students presenting their businesses to attendees, fostering a great networking opportunity for all.

Drake Jones, a senior at Civic Memorial, said he's starting his own photography business, adding he recently secured a camera with two lenses and a cleaning kit for just \$400. Once the camera arrives, he plans to take photos of everything from his personal interests of cars and nature to the more client-oriented fields of wedding and family photography. His table will feature the best of his photography portfolio, and he also plans to get some business cards made for the Trade Show.

Duarell Blocker, a Marquette Catholic senior, is looking to turn a profit in the snack business after scoring a deal on two vending machines - one for soda and one for snacks - for just \$300. He said he's already scouted a location for his machines in an office space somewhere in the local area. While he doesn't plan on lugging his vending machines through the Best Western Premier for the Trade Show, he said his table will feature a raffle and snack giveaways for attendees.

Civic Memorial Senior Lucas Lenger is getting into the automotive restoration industry with his next project, a 1982 "square body" Chevrolet. The car's lack of a running engine is "no big deal" to Lenger, who added he plans to swap the engine out anyway. He noted that sometimes, the best "barn finds" aren't discovered through online ads, but through word of mouth - something he hopes to accomplish through one-on-one conversations with Trade Show attendees.

Mason Walker, another Civic Memorial senior, said he plans to start a power-washing business. While he still needs to secure the power-washing equipment, Walker said he's currently and carefully weighing his options before making a purchase. His Trade Show table may feature time-lapse recordings and before-and-after photos showing the impact of his power-washing handiwork.

Walker won't be the only CEO student pitching a power-washing business this year, as Alton High Senior Josiah Donoho also looks to enter the industry after ordering his own equipment. Donoho said he also plans to showcase some before-and-after photos at his Trade Show table illustrating the dramatic difference his power-washing skills can make.

Alton High School Senior Jaida London plans to start her own baking business with a focus on sweets and treats. Her current specialty is decorating cookies to look like

cartoon characters, donuts, smiley faces, and more. She said her Trade Show table will showcase a wide variety of baked goods, which she's finalizing the arrangement of as she seeks other opportunities to engage with attendees.

Sammy Elliott Barnes, another senior from Alton High, is looking to start his own yoga business for athletes, families, and more. His table at the Trade Show will feature a display of various yoga poses and a yoga mat for attendees to try them out. Barnes added he expects the event will have the networking opportunities he needs to "hit the ground running."

Also in the athletic realm, fellow Alton High Senior Nathan Bartlett said he plans to resell weight equipment he sources from auctions and closing businesses before fixing it up for its next owners. He said he's now creating a Facebook page for the business, adding his table at the Trade Show will feature a pull-up bar, offering prizes to attendees who can hold themselves up for 60 seconds.

Marquette Catholic senior Laura Hewitt said she's starting a charcuterie business and is currently in the process of ordering product and setting up her business's social media pages. She said she plans to have individual boxes of her charcuterie products specially made just for the Trade Show. Jayda Duke, another Alton High senior who's starting her own candle business, said she's also in the setup stage with products on the way and social media pages pending.

Alton High School Senior Parker Mayhew's business will sell puzzles of local monuments and landmarks around Alton arranged into a collage. His table may include a partially-put-together puzzle for attendees to help finish by placing their own piece, or a time-lapse recording of Mayhew putting together one of his puzzles on display - either way, he said he'll be selling his puzzles at the Trade Show.

While some CEO students knew what their businesses would be from the beginning, others have had recent changes in plans - regardless, they agreed the program can help turn their business ideas into reality.

"I wanted to do photography - it's been something I've wanted to do for a while, but with the CEO program, it's just helped me discover more ins and outs of it," Jones said.

Walker agreed, adding he's always had business ideas, but the CEO program gives students the ability to "make it real." This year's CEO students spoke highly of the program, recalling several impactful speakers and experiences that gave them valuable tools for future success.

To learn more about the upcoming Trade Show, this year's Riverbend CEO students, their business projects, and their experiences in the program, check out the full interview with them at the top of this story or on [Riverbender.com/video](https://riverbender.com/video).