THE E-SPIRIT

A New Forum Hosted at the Walton College

THREE ARKANSAS ENTREPRENEURS visited the Walton College last September to share with students the successes and challenges of being the boss. The first Entrepreneurial Spirit Forum featured Frank Fletcher, owner of Frank Fletcher Companies, LTD; Gregg Ogden, president and CEO of Athletic World Advertising; and Jeremy Webb, co-founder, owner and partner of IFWORLD, Inc.

All three executives agreed that enthusiasm, good character and reputation are required qualities for success in any business.

“I love to get up and go to work every day,” Fletcher said. “I hope that you find a career in which you are totally excited about what you do.” Fletcher owns several manufacturing companies that sell products to retail chains — as well as 10 car dealerships, a Wyndham Hotel and two restaurants.

Panelists agreed that financing was a major obstacle in starting a business as well as the time it takes to build credibility.

“I’ve always been a self-starter and risk taker, even since the first grade,” Webb said. “I am seldom motivated by money. I believe in long hours and dedication.” Webb’s company, IFWORLD, provides networking, Internet, web design and a range of client services.

When one student asked how to keep clients happy, Ogden said, “Continually thank them for their business. Maintain an attitude of gratitude.” His company is the world’s largest producer of sports schedule posters for high schools and colleges. Ogden founded the Nike Athletic Director of the Year Conference to express his gratitude to his clients.

LISTENING TO GIANTS

The sixth annual Business Giants Forum filled the Reynolds Center auditorium to capacity with students who had the rare opportunity to talk with top executives. Walter Hussman, publisher of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette and president and CEO of WEHCO Media Inc.; J. Kirk Thompson, BSBA ’78, president and CEO of J.B. Hunt Transport Services, Inc.; and Edward Drilling, BSBA ’78, president of SBC Arkansas, made up this year’s Business Giants panel.

Dean Doyle Z. Williams moderated the event where only students were allowed to ask questions. Topics ranged from the transferring of jobs overseas to stories of the executives’ personal experience in the business world.

A recurring theme from the executives was the importance of having a good attitude in the workplace. When a student asked if academic achievements and grade point average mattered more to future employers than a good attitude and enthusiasm, all three guests agreed that enthusiasm is priceless. “We do look at your GPA, but also at extra curricular activities to assess your ability to be a team player or a team leader,” Drilling said.

Thompson added, “Simply getting a degree isn’t enough. You have to have that extra edge.”

In addition, with more businesses branching out to foreign countries, the executives advised students to learn a second language. Drilling explained that because SBC has business interests in 22 countries, bilingual employees would have an advantage.

Entrepreneurship was also an important topic for the forum. All three speakers encouraged students to start their own small businesses. “It’s extremely rewarding,” Hussman said. “It teaches humility and gives you a sense of personal accomplishment.”