

Bright Spark

JENNY WHITENER PROVIDES THE KINDLING FOR STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS TO START THEIR OWN CREATIVE FIRES

by Lauren Nettles

About 14 years ago, Jenny Whitener started Bridge Innovate, a global company focused on helping businesses remove obstacles to growth and produce real, meaningful change. Bridge Innovate stresses the importance of design thinking; according to the Bright Spark website, “Design Thinking provides students and educators with a proven pro-

cess for developing the fundamental skills of collaboration, critical thinking and communication ... empathy, problem solving, prototyping and experimenting and innovating new solutions.”

Before putting down roots in Chattanooga, Whitener regularly traveled the world with Bridge Innovate. “I was in Paris every month,” she says, and balanced a second office in downtown Atlanta. While this lifestyle was exciting, having her first child really changed

her views on what’s important in her life. “I never thought I’d be an entrepreneur, but seeing him in my arms made me reconsider my job,” says Whitener. She eventually settled in Chattanooga with her husband to raise their children, finding that the city has values that she shares and makes a welcoming atmosphere both for her children and her business ventures.

Two years ago, Whitener was approached by many school systems, asking if she could bring the same innovative, creative knowledge she gives to businesses with Bridge Innovate to schools, children and educators as well. And so,



Jenny Whitener inspires students.

Bright Spark began to take form.

When her children were going through school, Whitener began to notice an upsetting trend in the school system. “The higher you go in school, the less creative skills are taught in the classroom,” says Whitener. These skills are vital for people of all ages to develop. “As we’ve moved in business from an industrial economy to a creative economy, the skills around creativity and innovation are essential for businesses to compete and thrive,” she says.

Luckily, the fact that creativity isn’t taught in schools doesn’t mean children have no creative skills; it simply means they have nowhere to let them shine. That’s where Bright Spark steps in.

The summer workshops offered by Bright Spark are a great mix of home-schooled children and kids from both public and private schools. The kids are asked: If you could invent anything, what would it be? The imaginative students came up with everything from robotic peanut butter spreaders to 3D tablet projectors. Creativity and applications

to the real world are alive and well inside kids’ minds, and Whitener is determined to bring those brilliant ideas to the world.

Currently, Bright Spark is running a design competition with Green Sparks called Green Space. Five teams, made up of a combination of middle school students and professional designers, will design an outdoor classroom to teach about water quality and sustainability. The prototype will be pitched at the end of April.

“We couldn’t have done it alone,” says Whitener. Local foundations, education advocates and even the school system are proving to Whitener that she can develop a legacy of creativity for our students. And, as Whitener says, “When students are given the freedom to think creatively in problem solving situations, growth and success are inevitable.”

For more information or to sign up for a workshop, call (404) 437-7707 or email contactbrightspark@gmail.com.



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Jenny Whitener, CEO of Bridge Innovate and Founder of Bright Spark.