

Young entrepreneur sticks with it

Written by SARAH McCRAW
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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/050913/tapeSM.png> **Seventh-grade student turns a profit with her eye-catching duct-tape business**

Erica Gremminger doesn't have a business degree or a fancy title like chief executive officer, but she has been recruited to share her business experience with Port Washington High School students next week.

Gremminger lacks the credentials of other business experts because, at age 13, she hasn't had time to earn them. Yet, this seventh-grader at Thomas Jefferson Middle School in Port Washington has earned hundreds of dollars making, marketing and selling a rather unusual product — wallets, purses and other items made completely of duct tape.

That success caught the attention of Leeann Wellenstein, a Port High business education teacher who asked Gremminger to share what she has learned with Wellenstein's students.

Gremminger said it was her curiosity with the product that sparked the crafting venture more than a year ago.



“I've always been obsessed with duct tape, so then I started using it for crafts,” Gremminger said. “I was watching tutorials on YouTube on how to make a duct tape wallet. I really liked it, so I kept going on from there.”

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She quickly moved on to creating bracelets, pencil holders and purses.

Gremminger has about 100 rolls of tape in a rainbow of colors, designs and patterns.

“When I hear about a new tape that comes out, I run to the store and I have to get it,” she said, noting that she will occasionally purchase a special tape online.

“Surprisingly, there’s really rare duct tape. If I want a rare one, I can order it on the Duck brand website,” Gremminger said.

The tape is used up quickly because it takes at least one-quarter of a roll to create a wallet and nearly an entire roll to make a purse, she said.

“The items are all 100% duct tape,” Gremminger said. “I rip a piece then I put a little bit of the next piece on top of it and keep going until I get the desired length.

“Then I lay more tape on top of the sticky part, and that’s basically how you make a sheet. You just keep going from there.”

Gremminger said it takes 15 to 20 minutes to make a wallet, but can take a few hours to create a purse or larger item. “Sometimes it takes awhile to make something really big, so I work up an anxiety about doing it,” she said, adding that once she begins to create something, she rarely stops until it’s completed.

“I just can’t put it down once I start it. I love to look at how the finished product comes out,” Gremminger said.

Once in awhile a piece is just too good to let go of right away.

“If I loved a wallet too much, I’d keep it, but I’d realize afterwards that I wasn’t going to use it and sell it at the next craft fair,” she said.

Her parents Carey and Allen estimate their daughter has made about \$700 by selling more than 200 items to friends and during craft fairs at the middle school and on Fish Day.

“We’re very proud because she’s always wanted to do her own thing. She’s creative and quirky and fun. This is just her personality,” her mother said.

For Gremminger, the business is more about the artistic expression of her pieces, than the fashion, she said.

While Gremminger’s business plan is still developing, one idea for her marketing campaign stuck immediately.

“I have a slogan,” she said. “It’s ‘Duct tape crafts, made to last.’”

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Image Information: THE VIBRANT PATTERNS and designs on the estimated 100 rolls of duct tape owned by 13-year-old Erica Gremminger of Saukville are used to create wallets, purses, pencil holders and bracelets. A seventh grader at Thomas Jefferson Middle School, Gremminger has made and sold about 200 items to friends and at local craft fairs.

Photo by Sam Arendt