

STEPPING OUT

BY LARRY GALLONE

# RUNG TONE

CORPORATE EXEC SHOWS KIDS HOW TO CLIMB THE LADDER OF SUCCESS

**"MY PASSION HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO TEACH AND MOTIVATE."**

Sara Canuso



**S**ARA CANUSO IS AN IMAGE-maker. Polished and poised after years of successful business ventures, she knows that confidence looks good on everyone. And if you want to stand out in the world of business, you have to step out. History and math mold minds but when it comes to making your mark in the business world, it's time to start thinking on your feet. That's when Sara choreographs the perfect

presentation. She launched her unique program of confidence and common sense at Sts. Neumann-Goretti and turned a group of anxious students into a crew of confident job contenders during a dose-of-reality skit she calls "Stepping Out". She says her Stepping Out seminar is more than instructional. It's motivational. It's as much about self-confidence as it is about business etiquette. "Originally I went to Neumann-Goretti

with an idea for a program. There is a link missing with these kids stepping out into the world and dealing with people," Sara said. "We need to teach kids common sense things. Tips that will make them more confident about life outside their high school walls." After meeting with school officials, the six-week program was born. "Stepping Out: Out of yourself and into your future" is designed to build confidence and teach

lessons that have a lasting impression on people, she said. The response? Overwhelming.

"We thought she would have 20-25 juniors and seniors," said Patricia C. Sticco, Principal and acting president of Neumann-Goretti. "We were delightfully surprised when she had 90 kids sign up." To date, 40 students get together once a week for the after-school program.

## According to Sara's program outline, the class is designed to help students

- Build confidence
- Develop successful habits
- Speak with calmness
- Have a lasting impression on people
- Walk and talk with a commanding presence
- Start your day with the "I AM" attitude
- Set goals for your future
- Find your talents and passion
- Be Unique

The class is a commitment of time and tenacity. "We are already seeing that those kids who signed up for Stepping Out are having a positive experience in both the classroom and at home," Sticco said.

As far as the students are concerned, Stepping Out has exceeded their expectations thanks to Canuso's professional yet approachable demeanor. Her connection with the teens was immediate. A Goretti graduate herself; Sara anxiously addressed the students at her first Assembly. "I'm so nervous. I came to this school and sat in detention every day. If they (school administrators) find out I'm here – I may be back in detention. "I also tell the students that you need to dream big – and they are so excited to be part of the 'dream team' with Stepping Out," Sara said. In fact, Canuso said the kids started calling themselves the "Dream Team." "Kids have to believe in themselves; they need a positive influence to find their inherent talents and passion."

**M**ark Bomban, an 11th grader, said he's honored to be part of the Dream Team. "I have a strong feeling that it will help me boost myself into a great and successful future." Each week, class members build their personal portfolios. The first week, they learn how to properly introduce themselves and walk with a commanding presence. They practice handshakes while establishing eye-to-eye contact.

The assignments are straightforward. Get in the habit of saying 'thank you.' Give one compliment a day. Set goals. Practice public speaking. "We are building successful habits. Once you start getting into the habit of doing that, it becomes a natural part of your everyday life," Sara said. "Their talents and passion are in there but sometimes the students don't know how to get them out." The most important lesson? Think positive. Canuso asks students to write 10 positive affirmations, a technique she employed throughout her own

career. She compares negative thoughts and attitudes—which plague many teenagers—to a computer crashing. "So far, my experiences have been amazing. I feel more confident and I value myself more than I ever had," junior Valerie Spinosi confirmed. Tracy Dahn, also a junior, said the class is one of the best she's ever taken. "There is a lesson to be learned and we get to know things that we haven't thought about. Ms Sara is a really good teacher and role model. She shows us how we can be in the future if we pay attention and listen." Principal Sticco said that School Administrators intend to keep tabs on the Stepping Out group after they graduate high school. Did they complete college? Achieve their career goals? She said they will continue the program in future semesters. Originally from 20th and Wolf, and still a South Philly resident, Sara first practiced her program on an 11-year-old prodigy while vacationing down the Shore. Neighbors paid the youngster to water their lawns so Sara armed the eager entrepreneur with a few

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powerful suggestions for growing his business. And he did. She realized the potential of sharing her expertise with high school students. As her program grows, Canuso said she hopes to attract interested sponsors from the corporate sector—future employers that will benefit from a more savvy group of polished job applicants. "I love this class," Erinn Victoria King enthusiastically affirmed. "I try to use every new thing that Mrs. C (Canuso) teaches us each week." •••