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8-year-old Midlands girl snaps up state, national honors for barrette business

While most 8-year-old girls probably have their share of favorite hair accessories, Harbison-West Elementary School second-grader, Gabrielle Goodwin, can attest to having thousands.

“GaBBY Bows are hair barrettes I designed with my mom,” said Gabrielle, wearing and showing her favorite barrettes. “One of my favorites is the sweet pea because I like pink. We also have lady bug (barrettes) with different colors ... and we are making new ones too.”

Friday, the barrettes became available in 51 Bi-Lo stores around the state, joining 40 Walgreens in South Carolina and Georgia. GaBBY Bows also has been selected as a finalist in the U.S. Small Business Administration 2015 InnovateHER Business Challenge, recognition that comes with a chance to compete for part of \$30,000 in prize money during a live pitch competition May 8 in Washington, D.C.

A student in Lexington-Richland 5’s magnet program for academically gifted elementary students, Gabrielle was recognized in April by South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley as a South Carolina Young Entrepreneur of the Year, becoming the youngest to ever receive the award.

“It’s amazing to think that this all started with my daughter’s persistence,” said Rozalynn Goodwin, Gabrielle’s mother. “This is 100 percent her idea and vision. It was her asking me every day ‘when will the barrettes be ready?’ and ‘what about this, mom? I didn’t know anything about how to make hair barrettes and didn’t feel like I had time to start a business. But I did what any other mother would do ... She had a dream. And as far as her dreams could take her, I took steps to try to make it happen.”

The idea for the barrette business started with a few bad hair days. Goodwin says she loved styling her daughter’s hair in twists and braids but found that the barrettes were lost by the end of the school day. GaBBY Bows feature a more secure “Double-Face Double-Snap” design that could survive recess and other school-day activities.

“When we were designing the barrettes, Gabrielle and I would sit at the dinner table and compare what worked and what didn’t work,” said Goodwin, adding that she and her daughter worked on the business for more than three years before launching it in February 2014. “Gabrielle kept us on track, even when I didn’t want to go on. It was her faith and persistence that made me feel like we need to keep going ... like we might really have something here.”

Shelia Shelby, Gabrielle’s teacher at the Escolares Academy at Harbison West Elementary, has seen the same persistence and entrepreneurial spirit from the 8-year-old in the classroom. It was Shelby who nominated Gabrielle for the state Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

“The application stated that nominees should ‘demonstrate a keen entrepreneurial spirit,’ and this phrase most certainly describes Gabrielle,” Shelby said. “In the classroom, I can hear her share her experiences as a young businesswoman, which fuels the creative thinking of her peers. When working with groups of her classmates she demonstrates a fierce spirit of perseverance, and I know Gabrielle is well on her way to success in many areas of her life.”

For Gabrielle, the best parts of owning her own business are getting to travel and “play-dates”. The events allow the Goodwins to promote anti-bullying and sponsor a children’s shelter, inviting the children to play and the community to bring a wish list item for the shelter.

“The thing I like best about having my own business is traveling. I’ve been to Augusta, Chicago ... it’s a lot of fun to show the barrettes and meet new people.”

Submitted by Lexington-Richland