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LCHS senior wins at DECA nationals

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COEUR d'ALENE, Idaho - Jake Bryan loves his job at the Pita Pit.

The Lake City High School senior has worked at Pita Pit Corporate in Coeur d'Alene for two years, so he thought it would be a good idea to incorporate the company into his DECA project.

Bryan, 18, became the first LCHS student to win a national DECA award earlier this month in Orlando, Fla. He took first in the 2007 International Career Development conference in Entrepreneurship - Franchising, using Pita Pit, which are franchised restaurants, as his model. "You don't have to be a millionaire to open a Pita Pit, just have love for it and what you're doing," Bryan said.

DECA, or Distributive Education Clubs of America, is a class where students learn to become business people. Last year, Bryan won at state by researching a case study of situations that could occur in any restaurant.

For this year's project, he put himself in the situation of opening his own Pita Pit franchise restaurant. After research and help from LCHS DECA adviser Russ Blank, and Scott Hazlett with franchise development for Pita Pit, he chose Madison, Wis., for the location.

He said most Pita Pit restaurants are located in college towns, so that was part of the reasoning behind Madison. He had to write a proposal for a bank loan to get started.

"I was the general manager of the Coeur d'Alene store, and he worked for me," Hazlett said. "We had a great relationship and he's a very hardworking kid - always has a smile on his face."

Hazlett gave Bryan an information packet on franchising that they would give to anyone interested in opening a Pita Pit. From there, he created a written and oral presentation with colorful flip-charts.

Hazlett said there are now 127 Pita Pits in the United States, several in Canada and about 50 in the pipeline. "We talked about Madison," Hazlett said. "That's a possibility."

Blank took 31 students to nationals from LCHS. He said about 200 kids participate in each event. "Blank is the reason I got here," Bryan said.

Bryan plans to continue working at the Pita Pit until fall, when he heads off to the University of Idaho to attend the College of Business. He and all three of his older brothers are Eagle Scouts, and his mom and brothers are proud UI graduates.

