

Editor-in-chief turned entrepreneur

By **Tanner Boggs**
Staff Writer

As Brooklynn Cooper sat in class, something sparked her interest when a fellow student described the College Works Painting program. Cooper, the former teen editor-in-chief for the Durham VOICE, saw an opportunity for a paid internship she could not resist.

College Works Painting is a program that allows students to gain entrepreneurial experience by running an exterior painting company in the town of their choice. Cooper, a first-year UNC-Chapel Hill student, chose to intern in her hometown in Durham.

"I feel a lot more connected to my community being able to do this since I'm from Durham," Cooper said. "I get to offer services to people who can actually relate to me as a person and not some sales rep from California."

The Program

College Works recruits college students who want to gain experience in marketing and business.

"In the program we market throughout neighborhoods, and offer free estimates for house painting and do the estimates for them," she said. "In a few weeks we will be going through the hiring process with production starting in mid-May."

Cooper has done six estimates so far. One-story houses average about \$4,000 while two-story houses are about \$8,000. Her first painting job will be located on Fayetteville Road.

"They aim is for us to have a 25 percent conversion rate on our estimates, which I am pretty much on track for that right now," Cooper said, referring to College Works Painting.

A New Experience

Fellow UNC-Chapel Hill student Garrett Locklear, a sophomore from Winston Salem, is in a similar program called Student Painters, which helped him gain the entrepreneurial experience of running his own painting service. Locklear, who worked at the entry level of the internship last year and has since been promoted, said the internship set him up for success.

"Throughout the process I real-



Brooklynn Cooper, a first-year Media and Journalism student at UNC-Chapel Hill and former teen editor-in-chief at the Durham VOICE, runs her own painting company in Durham (Courtesy of Brooklyn Cooper).

ly just wanted to get to know what my strengths and weaknesses were," Locklear said. "A lot of people go into college with an employee mindset, but if you step out of that bubble you can see the world completely different. That's why I got into entrepreneurship. At the end of the day, I learned that persistence is the key."

The Editor-in-chief

Cooper's experience as teen editor-in-chief of the VOICE was invaluable to her. Carlton Koonce, professor at North Carolina Central University and adviser at the VOICE, saw her progress from the day he met her as a young freshman at Northern High School.

"She is exactly the sort of staff writer/editor any newsroom would want -- she has integrity. She meets deadline. She's a phenomenal writer. She's thorough; she's a charismatic and relatable," Koonce said. "Even outside of journalism, being an editor has its perks in that it translates to almost any other industry."

For Cooper, her entrepreneurial venture is just another aspect of growing as a person. She aims to go into the experience with an open mind and hopes to use this experience to her advantage, even as a journalism major with no prior knowledge in business.

"The internship is really geared for business management people, which is not really my field," she said. "At the end of the day though I mainly want to work on my people skills, and I think that this internship is perfect for that."

At the end of the day, student entrepreneurs are given a 25 percent share of their total revenue earned. For instance, Cooper's manager made over \$105,000 last year and took home \$20,000 as a result. Cooper hopes she can manage to be as successful although she hasn't decided what to do with her money.

"I might donate some of it but I probably want to save some of it as well," she said. "I'd like to save some for school and maybe even use some of it to get a new car."

By the Numbers

- Established in 1993
- 25,000 applied, 2,500 accepted
- Fewer than 10 percent have previous painting experience
- Average house costs \$3,000 - \$3,500
- Students earn 20 percent of profit
- Average profit was 21 percent