Camp teaches girls about 'boy jobs'  

Article by: KARA DOUGLASS THOM, Special to the Star Tribune  

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Not every 11-year-old girl can teach her family how to take care of a car, but Emma Gessinger shared that knowledge one evening after attending the Teens Experiencing Technology Education Camp last week at Dakota County Technical College.

Gessinger was one of 160 girls from fifth to eighth grade who explored the fields of design, business, health, science, transportation, industry and technology at the Rosemount campus.

The experience exposed the girls to a breadth of career possibilities, many of which are predominately male fields, said Linda Foster, the college's director of instructional technology. "They were out driving a backhoe and swinging the bucket, underneath a car for a full inspection, in an auto body shop spraying a car with water instead of paint," she said.

While some of the girls were hesitant to learn about 'boy jobs,' she said many of them came away from workshops such as automotive technology and nanoscience saying, "I didn't think I'd like that but I did."

Emma's mom, Julee Gessinger, said the drive from Shakopee was worth it. "We do a lot of community education, and what they pack into each day is beyond anything I've ever seen."

Along with the exposure to new subjects, the students also did take-home projects, including a solar oven made out of a pizza box, a jewelry box made in welding class and photos taken in the photography workshop.

Emma Gessinger said she liked learning everything from welding to child development. Being exposed to so many trades also allows the girls to figure out what they don't want to pursue. For instance, Gessinger now knows electrical line working is not for her.

While the camp was the first for the college, it partnered with the Geek Squad Summer Academy, which is in its fifth year of offering technology camps, to provide two days of computer technology programs.

"There is such a low percentage of people pursuing college degrees in technology who are female," said Nikki Marche, Geek Squad Summer Academy field lieutenant. "We want to show kids that technology is fun and easy to use."

This was the only Geek Squad Summer Academy in the Twin Cities, of 35 camps it runs nationwide.

About 65 of the girls were students from Laura Jeffrey Academy in St. Paul, a year-round school that
offered the Geek Squad program last year but needed a bigger facility. When the college stepped in to host, they extended the two-day camp into five days to showcase the technical college's other programs.

"A lot of times people drive by and just see this cement building on the highway and don't know all we have to offer," Foster said. "We wanted students to see what we have available at a technical college and to know this is another alternative to higher education. They're getting little bits and pieces of the college experience in a 75-minute workshop."

The instructors, it turned out, were as excited as the students, Foster said. "The girls bring a lot of energy to the building," she said. "I told the faculty that they're making the 'what we did over summer vacation' list. We're talking next year already."

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