Boy camp for girls

I spent most of my childhood with dirt under my fingernails, patches on my jeans and grease in places that still have me wondering how it got there. I grew up on a small hobby farm in western Wisconsin. I was either in my dad’s shop elbow deep in axle grease twisting wrenches, getting dirty in my mom’s vegetable garden pulling weeds or out baling hay in the fields. No one told me certain jobs would be off limits because I was a girl. Working hard was working hard no matter who you were.

Now as a mother of two daughters, I find their opportunities for getting dirty are limited by our suburban surroundings. They don’t have access to a big box filled with tools or pole barns packed with farm equipment. I work in an office with job duties that are hard to explain. I may not have chosen a get-dirty career, but I want my daughters to have career opportunities not limited by gender stereotypes. And more than that, I want other people’s daughters to know there are opportunities beyond traditional female careers. I want girls to know that it is OK to explore, OK to get dirty and OK to be smart.

Last July, I was thrilled to see more than 150 middle school girls exploring and getting dirty on our campus. The girls inspected cars on a lift rack, operated heavy equipment, designed buildings on a computer, conducted nanoscience experiments and built computers in TXT2011: Teens eXperiencing Technical education at Dakota County Technical College (DCTC). The girls had opportunities to explore careers in transportation, industrial trades, health, business, design, science and technology through hands-on workshops taught by DCTC program faculty and Best Buy Geek Squad.

As the girls left campus each day, it was almost as if they couldn’t talk fast enough to tell their parents all about their experiences having expanded their view of careers and educational opportunities that exist for them beyond traditional expectations for women.