

Earth Day celebration introduces Girl Scouts to engineer profession

Written by
Friday, 07 May 2010 11:47



Swapping out light bulbs, testing heating and cooling systems, and discussing ways to update older buildings for energy savings is a tough job for any team of engineers. But when the team's average age is 10, and they are proposing safety goals to administrators at their own middle school, the challenge is even tougher. Unless, of course, it's Earth Day and the budding engineers are Girl Scouts who come together to make our world a better place.

"We are looking at things like which light bulb is better to use," said Naya Tadavarthy, 10. "Maybe one is more money, but if it is better in the long run, then it's worth it. We are learning to notice the things around us more so we can keep learning about science and technology."

Tadavarthy, a fourth grader at St. Paul Academy and Summit School, joined more than 80 girls on Earth Day as they took part in "Get Moving," a project geared toward Girl Scouts in fourth and fifth grades investigating how energy can spark interest in their own lives.

"Whenever we have a chance to listen to children, we learn something," said Gregory Jackson, multicultural initiatives manager, Girl Scouts of the USA. "They have an awe and curiosity that we tend to lose when we become adults. We can always learn when we see what they are doing and seeing."

One of 36 councils nationwide awarded a grant to promote energy awareness and conservation, Girl Scouts of Minnesota and Wisconsin River Valleys partnered with volunteers from Trane and ThermoKing to teach girls that understanding science, technology, engineering,

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and mathematics can make a positive difference in their lives and their communities.

Girls who attend Laura Jeffrey Academy worked on an environmentally focused curriculum for several months as part of the grant program. The culmination of their work was the April 22 event hosted at their school where they conducting an energy audit with the help of engineers from Trane and ThermoKing.

Trane and ThermoKing are brands of Ingersoll Rand, which funded the grant for the six Girl Scout councils. The partnership was an excellent fit because science, technology, engineering, and math, or STEM, is one of five major areas of leadership development programming in Girl Scouts. Laura Jeffrey Academy in St. Paul is a STEM school for girls.

“Recruiting women engineers is a challenge,” said Mary Sueker, human resources representative for ThermoKing. “If we can spark interest at this age, we can help these girls grow into our engineers of the future.”

Laura Jeffrey Academy fifth-grade science teacher Arden Ashley-Wurtmann said the energy audit may be presented to the school at its end-of-the-year celebration so students and administrators can see how improvements in technology can directly affect their school community. But more importantly, Ashley-Wurtmann said getting the girls involved in this project is a great way to show them the growth and career opportunities that are connected to engineering.

“It is so important to get girls interested in math and science, especially at a young age,” said Valerie MacAlpine, Trane account manager who volunteered for the project. “It can be a good career and a good life for women. It has been for me, and I started back when we didn’t have the tools and the innovation that we have now. And we didn’t have the Internet to push out our message and reach the girls. We have to use the technology to get these girls interested and keep them interested.”

GSUSA’s Jackson agreed. “Only eight percent of skilled engineers are women, and what we want to do is use the Girl Scouts as a pipeline to this career field,” he said. “We need to expand opportunities for our girls beyond historical boundaries.”

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According to the US Department of Labor, 75 percent of tomorrow's jobs will require technology skills and that number is expected to grow over these girls' lifetime. "It's unfortunate that we weren't talking about these issues 10 years ago, but I'm excited to see what these girls will be getting done 10 years from now," said Sueker. "These are the girls who will lead us."

In partnership with 18,000 adult volunteers, the Girl Scouts of Minnesota and Wisconsin River Valleys helps nearly 45,000 girls each year—in all or portions of 49 counties in southern Minnesota and western Wisconsin—to discover new abilities, connect with new friends, and take action to improve their communities. Girl Scouts is the world's preeminent leadership development organization for girls, building girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place. For more information, call 800-845-0787 or visit www.girlscoutsrv.org