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Unfiltered: Lauren Pankin on What She Did on Her Summer Vacation
Posted by Karen Dybis Wednesday, July 14, 2010 at 10:14 am

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How far could Michigan progress – if it had the right partners?

To answer that question, I bring you a fresh voice for the blog. It belongs to Lauren Pankin, a 7th grade student at Pierce Middle School in Grosse Pointe Park. Pankin recently attended Camp Infinity, an annual technology camp sponsored by the Michigan Council of Women in Technology Foundation.

Read on, if you would. Pankin is precocious, precious and pretty amazing. If she is any indicator of Michigan's future, we're in good hands.

Some background: Now in its sixth year, Camp Infinity enables 40 metro-Detroit girls aged 9 to 13 years old to meet professionals in technology fields, develop websites, learn about robotics and video game design, and participate in various other technology activities. The camp took place June 28 through July 2 at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield.

The goal, according to Foundation members, is to introduce girls to technology as fun and rewarding, which results in the consideration of technology-related pursuits later in life and a reduction of the gender disparity gap in Michigan's IT jobs.

“Girls now grow up with technology, so it's counterintuitive that so few are pursuing it as a career choice,” said Marcy Klevorn, MCWT president and global director of IT operations for Ford Motor Co. “Interactive events like this help them see how interesting, hands-on and rewarding technology can be.”

On to Lauren...

Camp Infinity

By Lauren Pankin

7th grader at Pierce Middle School, Grosse Pointe Park

Before enrolling in MCWT Camp Infinity, I envisioned technology as uncharted terrain, dominated by stereotypically introverted males mundanely programming computers.

My initial interest had been sparked during a mandatory computer course in elementary school, but rumors of monotonous careers deterred me from pursuing the fascinating field. After Camp Infinity was recommended by my middle school computer skills instructor, who perceived my budding interest in technology, I enthusiastically embarked on a week of scientific discovery.

I immediately felt welcome due to an optimistic and helpful staff who explained complex computer codes calmly and efficiently. Our class designed intricate html web pages, adding advanced features such as marquees and guest books, and programmed Lego Mindstorm robots to engage in fierce sumo combat. Dr. Anneberg deviated from standard course curriculum and effectively taught introductory html related material, within four days of fascinating instructional periods.

After we had completed our detailed web pages, our class designed noise-creating circuit boards utilizing advanced technological blueprints. In robotics, Prof. Tedder mentored campers in comprehending logical software, and allowed us to apply what we learned while experimenting and creating unique inventions. After perfecting our techniques, we employed cumulative knowledge of robotics in order to battle fellow campers in a science-driven wrestling match. Campers not only learned about robotics, but also learned to collaborate with partners, engage in friendly competition and laud those who were ultimately victorious.

During intriguing lunch sessions with women in IT positions, I explored an array of fields, all related to technology. Brilliant employees hailing from Google, Microsoft, Ford, and SIM eagerly described their passion for computer sciences, and encouraged us to expand our horizons by considering technological careers. The employees were thrilled we had been exposed to computers and robotics at an early age, and expressed remorse that camps, promoting technology for girls, did not exist during their childhoods.

Female Chief Information Officers (CIOs) encouraged female campers to obtain high level careers in the technology field, which is frequently dominated by males. Not only did these successful women break the glass ceiling, they shattered the stereotypes that I had encountered in school. These inspiring meetings were followed by brief sessions with women who worked indirectly with computers to bolster their primary careers.

A chipper personal trainer from Compuware challenged us with a strenuous yoga session, and also enforced the necessity of exercise to negate the hours IT workers spend hunched over computers. Leader Dogs for the Blind pleasantly surprised us with a visit from their website designer, who lugged a retired service dog with her as an endearing example. I learned that technology not only applies to computers and engineering, but indirectly to other fields, and is an essential component in launching a rewarding career.

MCWT Camp Infinity has exposed me to the vast and expanding field of technology. Through interaction with women dedicated to their professions, intriguing instructors, and comprehensive programs, I discovered the captivating domain of computer sciences. I am now acquainted with several girls who share my passion for computers, robotics, and learning, due to the uniting influence of Camp Infinity. Counselors amazed campers by detailing the technological aspects of vocations seemingly devoid of computer sciences.

Although I would like to pursue a career in politics, I have learned how technology is utilized in this realm. Creating websites is a vital component in campaign success; digital polls are crucial in predicting outcomes in elections; and computerized ballot collections are necessary to circumvent counting errors. If I obtain a political position, I will definitely endorse funding for girls' explorations in technology, like Camp Infinity. In order to increase the diminishing female workforce in technology, more young women need exposure to computer sciences. In five brief sessions, Camp Infinity has transformed my perceptions of computers and robotics, and inspired me to consider a technological career.

After an enlightening week of Camp Infinity, I banished the misconception that technology is a foreign and intimidating field permanently biased toward men. My interests in computers and robotics flourished, and I hope to continue my explorations in the field of technology. I feel honored to have participated in such a revolutionary program, and I look forward to the day I can return as a mentor to inspire future generations of girls.