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AAUW Honored 12 Promising Young Women at Awards Ceremony

Submitted by Sandy Fox-Sohner



Top row, scholarship winners and keynote speaker, from left: Kate Ruth Greer, Jenanne Margaret Vaccaro, Danielle Feinberg, Mina Arasteh, Natasha Blazer, Mariah McKenzie Miller, and Elise Peterson-Trujillo. Front row, Tech Trek winners: Chun Che Free, Julia Moseyko, Audrey Moore, Natalie Davis, Ariella Zulch, and Molly Mudgett. Photo provided

The Orinda-Moraga-Lafayette (OML) branch of AAUW gathered with members, parents, and friends April 21 to award 12 remarkable young women from Lamorinda schools with Tech Trek camp scholarships or college scholarships.

Keynote speaker Danielle Feinberg of Pixar Animation Studios - a mainstay at Tech Trek camp on the Stanford Campus for several years - enthralled the audience with her love of computer graphics and showed scenes from the movies she has worked on, such as "Brave," "Cars," "Ratatouille," "Finding Nemo," and "Toy Story." She stressed the importance of mathematical equations when designing the movements and structures of animation, as well as behavior patterns, and she encouraged the girls to follow their dreams no matter how hard the courses or the problems.

In elementary schools, girls and boys are highly - and equally - interested in science and math, but by the time these students are in high school or college, the number of students taking science and math courses has dropped off considerably, especially for the girls. These are tough courses, and sometimes even some very smart students start to think they can't do it.

Tech Trek camp for eighth graders provides girls with the confidence and the excitement they need to succeed in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) courses and fulfill their dreams of entering science and engineering careers.

The OML AAUW branch has provided a total of 53 scholarships to Tech Trek camp for local middle school girls over the past 16 years. This year, 60 girls were nominated by their science and math teachers, and 52 interviewed with AAUW members to compete for the six camp scholarships. The six winning Lamorinda girls will be attending the Grace Hopper Tech Trek camp at Stanford University in July.

The Tech Trek scholarship winners for 2013 are Chun Che Free and Julia Moseyko from Orinda Intermediate School, Natalie Davis and Audrey Moore from Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School, and Molly Mudgett and Ariella Zulch from Stanley Intermediate School. These girls are outstanding students with a passion for science and math. Each girl read their application essay at the ceremony, indicating their wide range of career goals, including marine biologist, high-tech entrepreneur, mechanical or civil engineer, inventor, mathematician, and fighter pilot.

Based on the generosity of Gayle Uilkema, an anonymous donor, and AAUW OML donations, two \$5,000 scholarships, three \$700 scholarships, and one \$500 merit award were presented on Sunday to six very deserving young women. Each girl spoke impressively about her incredible accomplishments, career dreams, and college she will be attending. The four college scholarship winners for 2013 are Natasha Blazer from Miramonte High School, Mina Arasteh from Campolindo High School, Jenanne Margaret Vaccaro and Elise Peterson-Trujillo from Acalanes High School, and Mariah McKenzie Miller from Saint Mary's College. In addition, Kate Ruth Greer from Acalanes High School received a special merit award.

Anyone interested in supporting the AAUW-OML Tech Trek and Scholarship programs, or joining AAUW, may obtain more information by visiting www.aauwoml.org.

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