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## Middle School Girls Step into STEM Experience at Conference

By Sophie Braccini



Middle school girls have fun with science at last year's Tech Trek conference. Photo provided

"Every year I was thinking about the girls who had applied and had not been selected, and to all the other ones that had not been recommended by their teachers but could still have curiosity and an interest in sciences. This day is an attempt to reach all the middle school girls."

Cragholm needed allies to take on this project and reached out to Saint Mary's College. "I met Dr. Kristen Beck, who teaches Differential Calculus and The Art and Practice of Mathematics at Saint Mary's," says Cragholm. "We had monthly meetings, she was so encouraging and a great resource." Cragholm also brought Expanding Your Horizons on board. The nonprofit has vast experience designing programs to interest young girls in the study of science and mathematics.

"The girls can learn about FBI techniques in investigating a crime scene, how to take apart a computer and put it back together, what it takes to build a strong bridge, what a marshmallow would do in the vacuum that is also used to make integrated circuits, how to build a Star Wars galaxy with code, or how to find exo-planets and discover what powers a star, and much more," says Cragholm. The girls can attend three of the 12 different workshops offered that day.

The conference will begin with keynote speaker Danielle Feinberg, director of photography for lighting at Pixar Animation Studios, who will discuss how she uses computers for movies. She will share film clips from Pixar films and explain how the films are developed. The workshops are scheduled throughout the rest of the morning and afternoon. The conference will close with a motivational presentation by MJ Marggraff, mission support representative for Virgin Galactic's South Bay space agency.

Parents are invited to stay for a morning presentation by representatives from the Saint Mary's School of Science to learn how to foster their daughters' interest in STEM studies and careers.

The choice of workshops is on a first come, first served basis. Registration is \$20, opened to all

Middle school girls will have the opportunity to dig into science and mathematics at a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) day offered by the American Association of University Women March 19, with the support of Saint Mary's College and the nonprofit, Expanding Your Horizons. The conference offers a large variety of hands-on workshops for girls to choose from, each led by top scientists.

"The purpose is to capture the interest of the girls, show them the diversity of the scientific world and encourage them to pursue scientific careers," says AAUW member Stacia Cragholm, who originally thought of offering the workshops, open to all interested.

"For years now we have been sending a selected group of middle school girls to Tech Trek, a weeklong science camp," explains Cragholm.

middle school girls at <http://www.expandingyourhorizons.org/conferences/AAUWSAINTMARYS/>.

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