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A day filled with promise for 200 middle school girls

Submitted by Lynda Leonard



A participant listens intently to a discussion about architecture at the 2019 AAUW-OML STEAM Conference hosted by Saint Mary's College during the workshop "Architecture: Drawings to Three Dimension Models." Photo Lynda Leonard

The morning began with speaker Danielle Feinberg, the director of photography for lighting on Disney-Pixar's Academy Award-winning films "WALL E," "Brave," and "Coco" who spoke to 200 middle school girls about opportunities for them in STEAM-related careers (science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics) during the March 23 American Association of University Women Orinda-Moraga-Lafayette Branch's annual STEAM Conference at Saint Mary's College. Feinberg's love of combining computers and art began when she was 8 years old and first programmed a Logo turtle to create images. This eventually led her to a degree in computer science at Harvard. The event was hosted by Saint Mary's College and its School of Science.

After listening to the keynote speaker, each girl then attended three hands-on workshops, which they chose from a list of 19 topics ranging from Affordable Housing for Gummy Bears to Veterinary Medicine, the Buzz About Bees, FBI CSI, Creative Coding, and Disassembling and Rebuilding a Computer, among others. The middle school girls, who come from all over the East Bay, encountered many role models - women working in STEAM fields,

some representing careers the girls never heard of before.

The element of art was obvious in the workshop "Architecture: Drawings to 3D Models." Architect Kelli Franz of atelier-KS was the presenter. Twelve girls arrived, led by a junior monitor, a high school volunteer - in this case, a junior from Acalanes. The girls were presented with a problem. Given a base and 10 LEGOs they were to create a sculpture. That was easy and fast. The next step took a bit more time. Using a piece of architectural grid paper, they were asked to create elevation drawings of each of the four sides, plus the plan - the view from the top. The room became quiet as each girl focused on visualizing a three-dimensional object and translating it into a two-dimensional rendering on a piece of paper. Once that was completed accurately, they were given colored pencils to replicate the color of each LEGO block on the drawings.

The girls were then encouraged to write notes to the "contractor" on the "plans" to help clarify the drawings, providing additional information about the trickier parts of the design. Then they were asked to disassemble their sculpture and pass the pieces and drawings to the "contractor" (another girl) who was then to reassemble the pieces. It was not always easy, but eventually it was a success for everyone!

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