

STEMposium 2019

Regional educators have a message for girls in public schools — science and technology aren't just for boys

Insight Training & Educational Center, Inc. along with East Tennessee State University hosted this year's 5th Annual "STEMposium" for Girls Thursday morning, March 21st, giving students from across Northeast Tennessee an opportunity to engage in various hands-on science, technology, engineering and math activities. This group has featured Million Women Mentors of TN for the past few years.

The event gave approximately 90 students ages 12-18 a chance to complete activities in fields including robotics, pharmacy tech, biomedical studies, graphic design, digital media and mathematics, just to name a few.

"We've been doing this event for five years now," Insight Training and Educational Center CEO Mike Cummings said. "They do things they would not normally do outside their curriculum as 12-18-year-olds at the school. Some of the things are a little more advanced, but we know the kids can handle it."

"They absolutely enjoy it because it stimulates them to learn more. It's 'hands-on, minds-on.'"

Cummings said the annual event was held in partnership with organizations including the ETSU College of Business and Technology, Quillen College of Medicine and companies such as S&ME Engineering, Northeast State Community College, Eastman Chemical Co., Nuclear Fuel Services Inc., Ballad Health and the Tennessee Valley Authority.

One of the main goals, according to Cummings, was to get more women involved in STEM fields.

"Throughout history, most technological fields have been dominated by males, like engineering and stuff like that," he said.

Sara Shaffer, Senior Project Manager at S&ME Engineering in Johnson City, said she would like to see more women in fields such as hers, which has been traditionally male-dominated in previous years. She wanted to not only teach girls more about the "how-tos" of the field, but also aimed to encourage them to explore different career paths, as her parents did for her. "My session was focusing on geology and careers in engineering, so I talked to them about the importance of women in STEM careers and some of my childhood experiences," she said. "my parents really instilled in me to be a strong, independent woman to get my degree and a successful career."

In fields such as biomedical science, ETSU's Dr. Cerone Foster said the gender gap is slowly starting to change. Still, Foster said she'd like to encourage more girls to explore

the field. "For every female in STEM jobs, there's still about almost three men, so I still think there's a gender gap, even though we're seeing that change," she said. "I think a lot of girls don't realize the stereotypes involved and that they're just myths. "Some will see cars and think, 'Oh, that's 'boy stuff,' I can't do stuff like that,'" she said. "But it's not 'boy stuff' — girls can do it, too."

Sheila Boyington, CEO of Learning Blade and National States Chair for Million Women Mentors joined the event via Skype and shared the importance of planning and acting on your interests but also making sure that you find like minded people to be around. "Having a mentor who can provide you with a good path can help you move your career goal forward" she added to the conversation.

From June 3-28, Cummings said there will be yet another STEM event at East Tennessee State University. At the 2019 STEM Summer EXCEL Program, he said students will get a chance to spend the whole month at ETSU and engage in more intensive STEM activities.

At the end of the program, students will take a trip to the Washington, DC to view sites like the Ford Theater, National Museum of African American History & Culture, Holocaust Museum, The White House, Smithsonian and many more historic sites.

For more information on how to register, contact Cummings at mcummings@insighttec.org or at 423-926-6777.