

## Bright Career Future For Middle School Girls

January 27 2012 4:45 PM



The 17th annual GEMS (Girls Empowered by Math and Science) Conference points middle school girls toward exciting and high-paying careers in math, science and technology. The conference provides fun, hands-on workshops to discover and explore the real-life potential of careers like forensic science, dentistry, genetics, architecture, nursing, robotics, occupational therapy and engineering. The girls are able to choose from 15 different experiential workshops presented by successful professional women in these careers .

The conference was initiated 17 years ago after a study funded by the AAUW Education Foundation, "Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America," revealed that girls in elementary school show aptitude in math and science, but tend to fall behind in these areas during middle school. Linda Chapman, Dean of Academic Affairs at LCCC said, "At the point that middle school girls begin to drift away from math and science and begin thinking that they aren't good at it, they are closing themselves off from 85 percent of the career opportunities in this country."

The GEMS conference will be held at the McPike Complex, Lewis and Clark Community College in Godfrey on Saturday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Girls in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades from Calhoun, Greene, Jersey, Macoupin and Madison County and East St. Louis schools are eligible to attend and experience a fun day that very well may be the tipping point revealing a successful career path.

Examples of the interactive workshops are: forensic DNA analysis where the girls solve a crime and take a copy of their own fingerprints home; designing and programming a robot using LEGO Mindstorms kits and a PC; fun chemistry making ice cream from nitrogen; preparing invisibility cards to make Harry Potter smile; the science and craft of genetics – learning how DNA makes you unique; and, making personalized genetic jewelry to take home.

Cindy Encarnacion, PhD, Associate Director of Life Sciences at the St. Louis Science Center is a workshop presenter at GEMS for her eleventh year. Dr. Encarnacion believes that GEMS is a priceless resource for middle school girls and the community. "I think the conference helps the girls realize what is possible for them. There is still an imbalance of girls pursuing careers in math, science and technology. I love to see girls come into our workshop (DNA In You and On You! The Science and Craft of Genetics) on Saturday morning and experience their excitement, engagement and positive attitude once they take part in the activities. Math, science and

technology help build crucial life skills. The life skills of critical thinking, organizing information, curiosity and imagination are honed by math, science and technology. If one wants to succeed in the workplace, curiosity and imagination are really important. GEMS is a wonderful program.”

Interactive educational sessions for parents /guardians and teachers are also offered during the half-day conference, focusing on guidance and resources to support and empower girls 'interest in math, science and technology. Teachers attending the conference will receive five CPDUs.

The GEMS conference is sponsored by the Wood River, Alton and Jerseyville/Calhoun branches of the American Association of University Women, the Edwardsville Area Alumnae Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., and Lewis and Clark Community College.

For more information and convenient online registration, visit: [www.gemsconference.com](http://www.gemsconference.com) or call (618) 550-0950. Each GEMS workshop is limited to 15 students and always fills up quickly. Reservations are on a first-come, first-served basis. The cost is \$15 per participant. Registration closes March 9<sup>th</sup>. Give your daughter the opportunity of a life-time, calibrating her career GPS.

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