



GEMS Expands Girls' Career Horizons

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The 20th annual GEMS (Girls Empowered by Math and Science) Conference for area middle school girls focuses on providing young females an opportunity to learn about Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) careers. Participants are more likely to pursue and enjoy Science, Technology, Engineering and Math courses in high school and college as a result of the fun, interactive experience at the GEMS Conference.

Reservations are on a first-come, first-served basis. The cost is \$15 per participant (includes snack and conference T-shirt). Registration closes March 14th, 2015.

The girls enjoy hands-on, exciting exploration and discovery of their interests about careers like archeology, dentistry, occupational therapy, architecture, nursing, biotechnology, computer science and engineering to name a few. Girls are able to choose from 15 different experiential, workshops presented by successful professional

women in these careers. The workshop presenters are passionate about their careers and are an inspiration to the middle school girls. The importance of competence in math, science and technology is an integral part of each workshop.

Girls in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades from Calhoun, Greene, Jersey, Macoupin and Madison County and East St. Louis schools are invited to attend and experience a fun day that will expand their horizons and change the way they think about math, science and technology.

The American Association of University Women Education Foundation initiated the GEMS conference 20 years ago after funding a study — “Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America” — that revealed girls in elementary school show aptitude in math and science, but tend to fall behind in these areas during middle school.

“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,” said Dean of Academic Affairs Linda Chapman for Lewis and Clark Community College.

The GEMS conference will be held from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, March 21st, at Lewis and Clark Community College's McPike Complex in Godfrey. Each of the 15 GEMS workshops is limited to 15 students and always fills up quickly.

A sample of interactive workshops include: Tech Divas, where the girls learn about jobs with Google, IBM, and Microsoft and compose animated stories in a virtual world; Creating Architectural Diagrams and Plans, which are animated by participants through the use of 3-D software; Trash or Science, where girls learn about archaeological fieldwork by mapping past cultures’ trash; Exploring a Pond, where they discover how macroinvertebrate critters help scientists determine water quality; and, Veterinary Medicine, using X-Rays and microscopes to examine common dog and cat health issues.

A popular and eye opening session for all the girls is “Welcome to the Real World” sponsored by the University of Illinois Extension. The girls fast forward to age 24, choosing a career with a given salary, from which they budget rent, utilities, car, taxes, entertainment and other expenses based on their life choices. The program gives girls a glimpse of the real world of career choices, decision-making and money management.

The 2015 GEMS Conference has special sessions for adults. These sessions are designed to help parents, teachers and other interested care givers prepare to meet the challenges facing today’s young girls as they progress in their schooling. Each session

offers participants insightful, relevant approaches to support and prepare young girls to feel confident about engaging in science, technology, engineering and math studies while in school.

Teachers attending the conference will receive five CPDUs.

The GEMS conference is sponsored by the Wood River, Alton and Jersey/Calhoun branches of the American Association of University Women, the Madison County Graduate Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., and Lewis and Clark Community College and is a not- for- profit event.

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