

# STEM, Not for Sissies But Definitely for Girls

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## For The Chronicle

Eight o'clock on a Saturday morning is mighty early for junior high girls, but nearly 300 dragged themselves into Corbet Theatre for the 21st Annual Expanding Your Horizons Conference.

My daughter and I signed up last year, but when the alarm clock wailed, we rolled over and returned to dreamland. But next year might be easier after attending this year's event.

The morning started with a demonstration on electricity by Jaimie Thompson, of the Oregon Museum of Science & Industry, aka OMSI, who first inflated a pink balloon and rubbed it against her hair and then hauled out a huge red ball and rubbed it on a wool blanket to generate static electricity.

She showed how positive and negative magnets attract while two positive or two negatives repel one another. But the real fun began when the Van de Graaff generator created lightning bolts and later left girls on a rubber stool with their hair literally standing on end.

"Bethany can't wait until next year," said Marcie Scott, of Toledo, who accompanied her eighth-grade daughter. "She loved the OMSI gal! She was so engaging and funny."

Using volunteers, Thompson explained the difference between static electricity and electrical currents that run into the home. She described how renewable energy such as wind turbines, hydroelectric dams and solar panels harness power. Girls also held a Tesla coil to light bulbs on a table.

After the hour-long presentation, the girls headed to separate rooms to learn about careers in science, technology, engineering and math, fields often populated by men. Each girl selected two from among 17 workshops with hands-on activities. My daughter learned from architect Marnie Boomer Roberts how to redesign a house and from Jennifer Winter, a physician's assistant certified in dermatology, about taking care of skin. She even stitched a pig's foot!

Dr. Brandy Mauel Fay showed kids what it's like to work as a veterinarian.

"The best part I liked was when we got to see the cats in The Other Family Doctor," said eighth-grader Morgan Labeck, of Toledo. "We got to stitch a pig foot and have hands-on experience with the cats and stitching. I am glad I went. It was really fun. If I could, I would totally do it again."

She will have another chance since each year the American Association of University Women sponsors the event for seventh-, eighth- and ninth-graders in Lewis County and southern Thurston County.

"I liked best that it had hands-on activities," said Hanna Tyner, another Toledo eighth-grader. "Like in The Arresting Profession, we got to fingerprint and arrest each other, and in Babies & Kids R Us, we got to see the different medical jobs and also to prick fruits like how you would to get a blood test for a baby."

Using medical equipment also proved fun, especially since she wants to work in pediatrics. "I'm really glad I came because every time I go there, I'm closer on what I want my career to be."

Other classes focused on radiation, engineering, library research, physical therapy, electronics, aerodynamics, chemistry, firefighting, crime scene investigation, courtroom trials, environmental cleanup and crafting jewelry.

While the girls learned about STEM professions, parents gathered in another room to hear about financial aid and scholarships to help their daughters attend college.

"The ladies didn't make you feel stupid when you asked questions and were willing to answer all the questions," Scott said.

I'm so glad I attended Expanding Your Horizons with my daughter, whether she decides to pursue a career in science or tap into those excellent writing skills she already has. I think we'll wake up on time next year.