

# STEM camp fuels girls' interest in science and technology

BY MATT JONES

THE WEEKENDER

MILTON — While the classroom is an ideal space for students to first get introduced to the theoretical concepts of science and technology, there is often a need for a place that allows kids to further explore and apply what they read about in school.

“What we know about girls is that they are equally interested in science through early middle school, but for some reason their interest drops off as they get older,” said Alice Justice, a retired school counselor and former biology teacher who has been involved with STEM camps for more than three decades. “What we really want to do is expose girls to all the different types of science, technology, engineering and math opportunities that there are.”

That is precisely what the 2023 Girls STEM camp is designed to do. Administered by the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU), the camp, in its fifth year, gives middle school-aged girls the opportunity to learn about how science intersects with their daily lives. It was held this past week at the CSIU headquarters in Milton.

“We focus on girls because they don’t typically find themselves going into a STEM career, so we wanted to raise awareness,” said Tanya Dynda, instructional technology and STEM specialist. “This is a result of a PA Smart Grant that we received.”

Over the course of the week, girls from a variety of school districts — including Central Columbia, Shikellamy, Northumberland Christian, Warrior Run, Southern Columbia and Mifflinburg — had the chance to engage in a broad array of activities and field trips that exposed them to



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**Kaitlyn Hock, right, a CSIU assistive technology and STEM consultant, helps Kyra Mortimer, center, and Jocelyn Rarig, back right, on their PowerPoint presentation, while Tanya Dynda, left, the instructional technology and STEM specialist, supervises.**

different aspects of science and technology.

Monday’s focus was on a Makerspace, in which the girls made their own tie-dye shirts and learned about the different materials and technologies involved in the process, including laser engravers, vinyl and shirt design.

“Tuesday and Wednesday, we got circuitry and programming,” said Dynda, adding that the girls got to use an arduino, an open-source electronics platform, as well as breadboards, jumper wires and LED lights. “We went through a few days of that just to experience coding and programming.”

Agriculture was Thursday’s theme, as the girls went out into the field to witness soil testing and learn about how technology is employed in growing crops and maintaining orchards. On Friday, the group completed a riverwalk at the Sunbury boat launch, led by the Middle Susquehanna Riverkeeper Association.

“They got to experience walking through that part of the river and finding all the microvertebrates and seeing environmental science in action,” said Dynda.

“We found a whole bunch of different bugs. We also found a catfish head,” said Kyra Mortimer, a Warrior Run Middle School student.

“We also found a worm today, so we’re going to put the worm in our presentation,” said Maggie Hamm, a fellow Warrior Run Middle School student.

Kennedy Moore, a student at Warrior Run Middle School, noted that they named the worm Jerry. For Moore, her favorite activities of the week were tied between a visit to a red deer farm — where she had a chance to feed deer — and a flower farm, where she tried a new type of food.

“I never had a currant before and I tried some and they were really good,” she said.

The week proved illuminating for many of the girls, as they had the chance to discover new interests and

potential career paths. A visit from weekday morning meteorologist Logan Westrope reminded Kyra Mortimer that she still wanted to be a meteorologist, though learning about the hours of that particular career surprised her.

“When she heard they had to wake up at 2 a.m., her eyes widened,” said friend and Warrior Run Middle School student Rachel Roslevich.

To end the week, the girls broke off into four groups to deliver presentations about their experience of the camp.

“(The camp) just brings awareness to the science fields. It just kind of opens their eyes to different fields that are out there,” said Kaitlyn Hock, assistive technology and STEM consultant. “I really just want to see this grow, if it is at all possible. We’d love to get more money for next year so we can run this camp again.”

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