

Diva Tech highlights trade, tech careers

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Armed with bright pink, blinged out hard hats and a sense of adventure, 38 high school girls from the Chequamegon Bay region got to be a high-tech diva for a day.

Students from Ashland, Bayfield, Butternut, Drummond, Hurley and Washburn High Schools participated in Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College's Diva Tech, held at WITC-Ashland. The event highlighted nontraditional careers in the trades and technical fields and was sponsored by the Ashland Chamber of Commerce, CESA #12, NWCEP, WITC and the Career Prep Consortium.

"A career choice should be all about interests and abilities, not gender stereotypes. And while times have changed, a gender gap still exists," WITC Vice President for Student Affairs Steve Bitzer told the group.

Nationwide, women are underrepresented in manufacturing and technical careers, which are some of the fastest growing fields. These careers often offer high wages, with only a one- or two-year technical college degree required.

Bitzer also explained that nontraditional careers can help to narrow the earnings gap between women and men.

"Women who work in nontraditional jobs like the career choices that will be highlighted today earn up to 30 percent more than those working in nontraditional fields," he said.

Machine tooling technics graduate Jenny Bannick encouraged the girls to pursue their dreams, even if that meant challenging others' expectations. Although Bannick grew up thinking she would be a world-renowned journalist, she's proud of her accomplishments and the title tradesmen.

"No matter where I go, where I'm at, manufacturing has helped me find my capabilities and develop into who I am," she said.

The high school students had the opportunity to choose two career fields to explore, including information technology, machine tool operation, marine repair technician and welding. WITC students were on hand to demonstrate and teach the girls how to use the equipment in the field.



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Marine repair technician student Vanessa Houle, right, shows Diva Tech attendees basic maintenance such as changing a spark plug.

“Many had never welded their own art project or changed a spark plug before, and it was really cool to see how proud and excited they were,” said Dan Miller, WITC-Ashland career specialist.

As one of the organizers of the event, he deemed it a success and said the college will consider expanding Diva Tech to its other campuses.

Ranked fourth best two-year college in the nation by Washington Monthly Magazine, WITC serves the educational and career needs of more than 25,000 residents of Northwestern Wisconsin each year. With multiple campuses, WITC offers career-focused associate degree programs, technical diplomas, short-term certificates, customized business training, and a wide array of courses for personal or career enrichment. WITC is a member of Wisconsin Technical College System. For more information, call 800.243.WITC or visit witc.edu. WITC is an Equal Opportunity/Access Employer and Educator.