

Inspiring Youth



Photos courtesy Praxair

In 2006, Tamara Brown, Controller for U.S. Project Execution for Praxair and President of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Buffalo branch, wanted to create an opportunity for young women to explore the world of chemistry. Her vision and hard work led the way to creating the Tech Savvy program, a

day-long conference that offers a fun way for girls to explore careers in science, technology, engineering, and math. Now in its third year, the program has evolved to include over 400 girls, as well as parents and educational professionals, and is the largest program of its type in the Western New York area.



Tamara Brown speaks to participants about her own career in the chemistry industry.

"I knew a program like this would benefit the schools in the area," says Brown. "There was a need for girls to gain an interest in science and see it can be fun."

With a background in chemical engineering, Brown has built a career around her love for math and the sciences. Her involvement with AAUW, which began seven years ago, provided the opportunity to share her passion for education with young women in the community by creating Tech Savvy.

The program encourages girls in grades six to nine to explore science, engineering, and math careers while considering their personal path to college through engagement in a variety of workshops. The sessions, which are conducted by female professionals in the field, are meant to turn complex chemistry principles into relatable, everyday topics.

"The first year we offered the program, we had 20 different workshops for the girls," says Brown. "I was completely surprised by their interest in the material. For example, in one of the workshops, Candyland, the girls learned about polymer chemistry by creating their own

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The workshops demonstrate fun and interesting ways for the girls to learn about chemistry and how it relates to them.

beauty products. Now they are trying to sneak into that workshop because it always fills up fast."

The conference also includes workshops for parents, teachers, and other educational professionals.

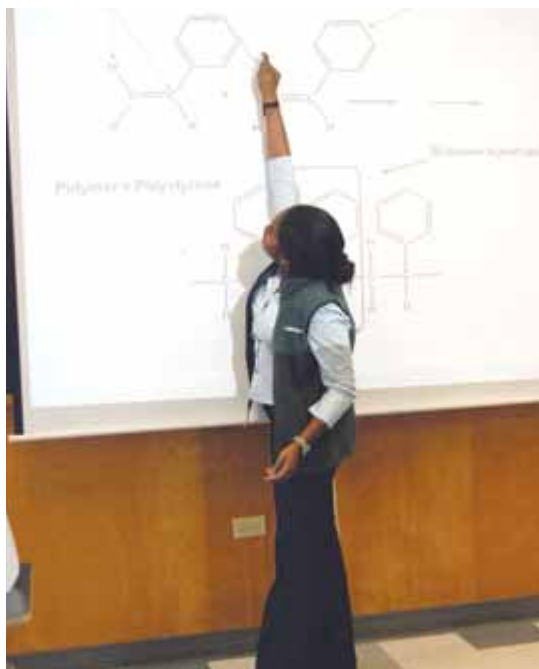
"Teachers saw the opportunities with the program and schools took a strong interest early on," she says. "Parents need to be involved in an initiative such as this because they are the ones who spend the most time with their children."

Aside from providing a fun way for the girls to learn, the program also aims at preparing them for their future careers. Some of the more recently added workshops include a showcase of career opportunities and a chance for the girls to talk to representatives from respective colleges.

"My goal at the end of the day is to have them be better prepared for their future," says Brown. "I want to facilitate a program that reinforces this type of thinking all year round and continues the dialogue between girls and colleges."

By offering a chance for girls to become interested in chemistry, Brown believes she is paving the way for the future of the industry. This, she says, is what ultimately motivates her.

"In just one day, their eyes are opened," she says, "and they begin to see exactly what chemistry is. Some girls come in with a narrow idea and leave with new goals and ambitions. To me this is important, because



The workshops are aimed at encouraging girls to explore careers in science, technology, engineering, and math.

they are the future talent, and I believe it is critically important for each of us to give back to today's students to provide opportunities for their future."

Students and parents can register for the program with brochures distributed throughout Western New York at schools, libraries, and community organizations, such as Girl Scouts. The conference is always held on a college campus. This year's was held on March 7 at the University at Buffalo. ●

For more information, visit www.aauw.buffalo.edu.