

DigiGirlz Day helps young women learn tech world

Wilmington University in Dover hosts event

By **Jamie-Leigh Bissett**
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DOVER — As of 2008, women received only 18 percent of computer and information sciences undergraduate degrees, down from a high of 37 percent in 1984, according to the National Science Foundation.

Even though women make up nearly 47 percent of the workforce in the U.S., they hold just 25 percent of mathematical and computer science jobs, and only 11 percent of engineering jobs. The percentage of minority women in engineering jobs is even lower.

Those statistics concern the Delaware Department of Education, which joined forces Tuesday with the state Department of Technology and Information, the Delaware Center for Educational Technology and Microsoft to host the state's first DigiGirlz Day at Wilmington University in Dover.

Microsoft spokeswoman Donna L. Woodall said the all-day event exposed eighth- and ninth-grade girls to the world of technology in the hopes of "breaking down the barrier of intimidation" when it comes to pursuing a career in technology.

"Young ladies from sixth grade on shy away from math and science because they lose confidence or interest in it," she said, adding that in many cases parents and schools are not encouraging girls to take math and science classes.

"DigiGirlz was started as a way to reach more girls to equalize and balance" the technology world, Ms. Woodall said.

The young ladies were introduced to the latest innovations in technology, interacted with Microsoft executives and participated in product workshops. One such workshop asked the girls to partner up and create a world in Kodu, a free game design tool that teaches users the basics of computer programming.

"It's an easy to use technology for almost any age level," Ms. Woodall said, adding that Microsoft uses Kodu to develop Xbox 360 games. "It teaches critical thinking, problem solving and how to have fun."

The girls certainly seemed to have fun while they learned.

"It was cool, but pretty complicated. There were so many options. I was a bit overwhelmed," said Kayla Kennedy, a Smyrna High School freshman.

"It was a lot of fun. There were a lot of tutorials and not enough time to learn it all," said Megan Hoffstadt, an eighth-grader at Dover Air Force Base Middle School.

Others knew this was an opportunity of a lifetime.

"Our teacher only picked a handful of us, so it was an honor for us to come," said Katherine Krawietz, an eighth-grader at Dover Air Force Base Middle School.

Ms. Woodall said those who participated were chosen by teachers, parents and counselors based on their interest and ability in math and technology.

She said the Department of Education and Department of Technology and Information decided to invite only eighth- and



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From left, Smyrna High School freshmen Breanna Wharton, Kayla Kennedy and Annalisa Trabaudo create their own world in Kodu, a free game design tool that teaches users the basics of computer programming, during Tuesday's DigiGirlz program at Wilmington University in Dover.



Diana Wilson, left, and Gretchen Wilson, freshmen at Smyrna High, enjoy their experience working with Kodu during Tuesday's DigiGirlz event presented by the Delaware Department of Education, Delaware Department of Technology and Information, Delaware Center for Educational Technology and Microsoft.

ninth-graders because they believed that age group would benefit most.

Alison Kepner, spokeswoman for DOE, said research by the American Association of University Women and other organizations found that girls make decisions on whether to embrace science and technology in their late middle-school years or early high-school years.

Ms. Woodall said DigiGirlz started in 2000 as a multi-day camp that provided high school girls with a better understand-

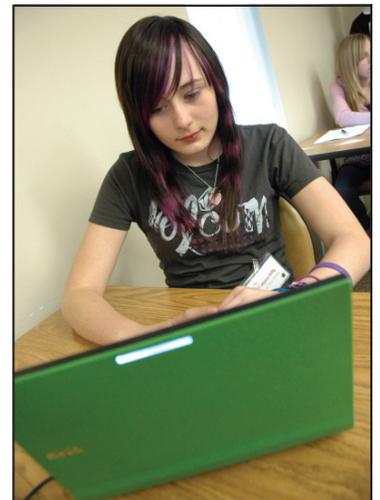
ing of a career in technology.

Microsoft, however, decided it could reach more girls by hosting one-day events at various locations worldwide.

She said DigiGirlz programs are held in 40 cities across the nation, and five outside the U.S.

Ms. Woodall said each event is customized based on the age group.

This is the first year Microsoft has held a DigiGirlz program in Delaware.



Alyssa Kelly, an eighth-grader at Dover Air Force Base Middle School, learns about computer programming and coding in a graphical way using a free Microsoft program called Kodu.

For more information about the Microsoft DigiGirlz program, visit www.microsoft.com/digigirlz. To download Kodu free, visit fuse.microsoft.com/kodu/.

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