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Summer timeout for science

Girls n' Gear hopes to raise county girls' interest in engineering

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NEWARK -- The afternoon sun streamed through the windows in The Works meeting room as Hanna Heimerl and Megan Moretti sat on the carpeted floor, peering over a setup of wires and tiny light bulbs and batteries.

The 13-year-olds were building a circuit, running into a few snags along the way but relatively undaunted. As Heimerl's long pink fingernails adjusted a red wire to match with a black one, Moretti expressed disappointment at a summons to the front of the room for a demonstration of the proper circuit setup.

"I wanted to figure it out for ourselves," Moretti said with good-humored reluctance. Her zebra-patterned cell phone sat on the ground next to her, set to vibrate mode per camp rules.

Welcome to Girls n' Gear.

The camp for Licking County girls between the ages of 12 and 14 channeled the minds of 17 young students Monday, introducing them to the world of engineering in hopes of piquing their interest in the field.

All the girls were recommended by their science teachers for the five-day camp, which began Monday with engineering fundamentals and will wrap up Friday with prototyping.

"The whole purpose is to keep them excited," said Lisa Sharpe, STEM education coordinator at The Works. "To still be interested in the sciences. To say, 'Hey, it's still cool to be smart.'"

The Works' STEM program stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math and is incorporated into all the activities there.

In the case of the first Girls n' Gear Camp, the application involved not just a week of learning and mentorship by other female engineers but follow-ups in the future, Sharpe said.

Next year, the 17-member "pilot group" will be studying chemistry and physics, and the year after that will focus on information technology and robotics.

Then, it will be up to the students to pursue their direction of choice.

"All week is about what potentials are out there," Sharpe said.

As they worked together on their circuit, partners Adessa Kelson and Jordyn Monroe, both 14, discussed what had brought them to the engineering camp.

The Newark students said it was a way to keep them busy, and they enjoyed the hands-on approach to learning.

Did their friends think they were crazy for choosing circuitry over swimming pools for a week of their summer?

Perhaps, but that was the risk they were willing to take.

"Some of them got asked, but they didn't want to," Kelson said, then turned back to the circuit board to get the job done.



Devyn Quick, 14, and Amanda Miller, 14, both of Newark, work together Monday to make a simple circuit during Girls n' Gear at The Works. (Eric George, The Advocate)