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Girls show collaborative spirit at weeklong construction camp

By **Brian Pedersen**, July 16, 2018 at 11:44 AM



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Let's Build Construction Camp for Girls organized by ABC and two other organizations, Construction Specifications Institute Greater Lehigh Valley Chapter, and Lehigh Valley Architecture, Construction and Engineering. - (Photo / Brian Pedersen)

With howls and yells of feverish support, four teams of girls competed in a nailing competition where sparks flew and spirits rose as the group who got the fastest time to hammer a nail into a 2x4 enjoyed a moment of triumph.

It all took place Friday afternoon inside the Eastern Pennsylvania's Associated Builders and Contractors training facility in Hanover Township, Lehigh County.

The nailing competition served as the culmination of a weeklong Let's Build Construction Camp for Girls. The event was organized by ABC and two other organizations, Construction Specifications Institute Greater Lehigh Valley Chapter, and Lehigh Valley Architecture, Construction and Engineering.

It serves to provide career info and hands-on training activities for girls 14 to 18 who have interest in the fields of

construction, architecture, engineering and related fields. Proceeds raised from the event through the sponsors benefited the camp and the ACE Mentor Program-Lehigh Valley Chapter, a nonprofit.

HOST OF SKILLS

This year marks the second one for the free camp, with 21 girls participating.

Organizers said they borrowed the nailing competition idea from Habitat for Humanity, offering a spirited, fun finish to a program that taught them new on-the-job skills each day.

The girls learned a host of skills in the trades, including wiring, masonry, roofing, carpentry, plumbing and installing drywall. Each team built a project, which included a walled structure with a window installation, tiling, paint, masonry and its own creative design.

Organizers incorporated the feedback from previous campers into this year's programming, said Kristen Fallon, regional membership director for ABC's Eastern Pennsylvania chapter.

Local companies sponsored the event and provided materials.

TEAMWORK

This year, the girls created new structures and had to complete them within the week. Habitat for Humanity will take pieces of the structures and incorporate them into homes the organization builds, Fallon said.

"We wanted to ensure it was sustainable and things weren't just going to end up in a landfill rotting," Fallon said.

Teamwork proved to be a pivotal role in how they accomplished their goals, an essential skill for the workforce.

"You have to work together to get the job done," Fallon said.

SUCCESS STORY

Jon Lattin of CSI said he was impressed with how the girls came together as a team.

"The things they are able to accomplish, how they came together. They came in quiet, scared and end up being friends," Lattin said.

Fallon said organizers helped one of the girls who attended the camp last year find a job in the construction field.

That former camper, Sarah Liebel, returned this year as a volunteer and now works as a compliance administrator at Servpro of Upper Bucks in Perkasie.

"When I went to the camp, it was great being a camper, but volunteering, it was equally as fun," Liebel said. "All the field trips were amazing. Last year and this year, all of the girls have been amazing. A lot of the girls would never have the chance to get exposed to it."

The girls toured two local companies, Victaulic and Glen-Gery Corp., where they learned skills in pipefitting and masonry.

CONSTRUCTION AND BEYOND

The girls hail from school districts in the Lehigh Valley and beyond, including one from New Jersey. Fallon said there

are no restrictions on location and did not want to have any socioeconomic barriers for the girls to participate.

One of the benefits of the program is that it is not limited for those interested in construction as a career. It can be helpful for those interested in pursuing construction-related marketing and office/administrative roles to gain knowledge of industry products and how they work, according to Fallon.

“We can expose the girls to engineering; you are not limited to hands-on construction,” she said. “Nothing else is all-encompassing.”

CAMP FOR BOYS

Organizers hope to offer a boys construction camp in the future and see the camp as way to address the labor shortage in the industry.

Through a collaborative effort with local colleges, organizations and companies, the event proved to be successful, according to organizers.

The organizers also brought in instructors from local colleges to lend their expertise.

“They see the value of passing on their skills to the next generation,” Fallon said.

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