



PHOTO COURTESY OF GIRLS INC. OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Inside the control room of KOIN6 news, Girls Inc. of the Pacific Northwest students learn the technical details behind the nightly news.

# A girl walks into a science class ...

Local programs inspire K-12 girls to pursue careers in STEM fields, where women are lacking in numbers

BY EMILY GREEN  
STAFF WRITER

Everyone knows: Girls struggle with math and science, right? Google “kids science kits.” Most of the products you’ll see are clearly marketed toward boys, and those that aren’t – the predominantly pink, so-called science kits

produced for girls – display words like “Perfumery” and “Spa’mazing” on their packaging.

From an early age, with antiquated gender stereotypes, a lack of female mentors in STEM leadership roles, and other direct and indirect messaging, many girls shy away from considering a career in science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM.

But studies have repeatedly shown girls are just as apt to excel at math and science as boys, and with continuing growth in the STEM-

related job markets on Portland’s horizon, local economists and tech industry leaders say it’s time to let them know.

Tech is one of the fastest-growing and

most lucrative industries in the metro area, and right now, white men disproportionately occupy the jobs within it.

During the first quarter of 2015, men filled nearly 70 percent of all tech positions in the Portland and Vancouver metro region, and while whites make up about 75 percent of the regional population, they occupied 84 percent of tech jobs, according to data compiled by the Portland Development Commission.

In 2014, about 1 in 4 job openings in the Portland region were STEM and health care occupations, said Amy Vander Vliet, a regional economist with Oregon Employment Department.

“Looking forward, the tri-county region is expected to create nearly 12,000 new STEM jobs by 2022, or about one out of every 12 new jobs,” she said, adding that between job growth and vacancies, there will be about 26,000 STEM job openings – not including the health industry.

But STEM jobs remain unfilled longer than jobs in other fields, indicating the skills are in high demand relative to the supply, and the supply of qualified women and minorities is even smaller.

At Intel, only 25 percent of staff is female, and far fewer are minorities. This prompted the company to pledge \$300 million in early 2015 to diversifying its workforce over the next five years.

...

While many national and local tech companies announced plans to diversify

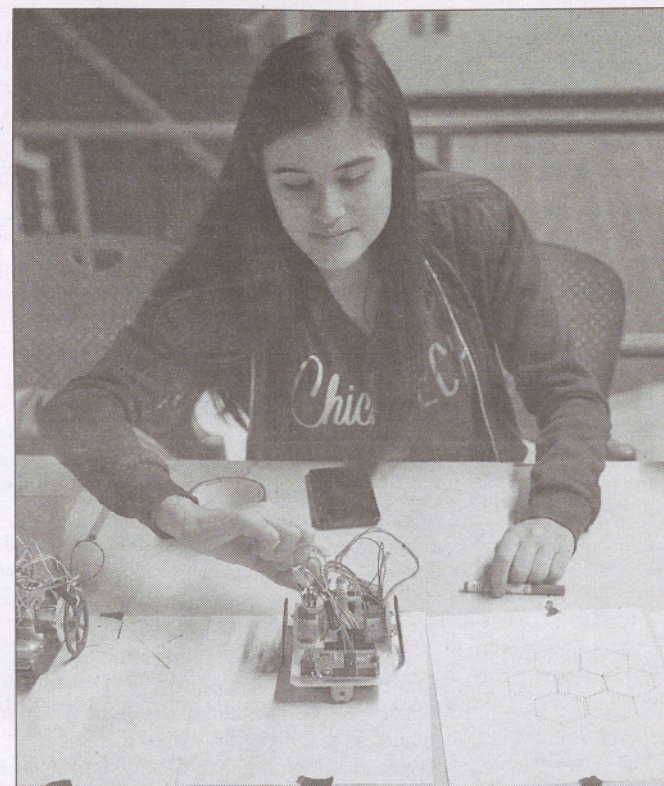


PHOTO BY WOJTEK RAJSKI

A participant at ChickTech: High School’s kickoff in November shows the audience what her robot does. The paper on the right shows a honeycomb pattern that was programmed into it.

their workforces by recruiting more women and minorities, some experts say they’re overlooking the root cause.

See GIRLS INC., page 5

## BY THE NUMBERS

- 5% Venture-backed startup founders who are female
- <20% Female students who took the Advanced Placement test for computer science in 2013
- 26% Computing jobs in the U.S. held by women
- 5% Girls who consider a STEM career
- 20% Boys who consider a STEM career
- 73% People who believe the tech industry is sexist

SOURCES: PORTLAND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION, OREGON EMPLOYMENT DEPARTMENT, THE GUARDIAN, NEXT GENERATION RECRUITMENT