Girls encouraged to pursue STEM careers

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Encouraging young women to pursue STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education was the focus of Expanding Your Horizons, a conference hosted by the New Mexico Network for Women in Science and Engineering and held at Santa Fe Community College on October 15.

Nearly 200 fifth- through eighth-grade girls attended the event, which featured speakers, workshops, and a STEM fair that encouraged participants to explore careers in science, technology, engineering, and math.

“I’m committed to increasing the number of women and underrepresented minorities in STEM,” says Los Alamos scientist Sara Del Valle, who was the event’s keynote speaker. “Therefore, it was very important to me to share my experience with girls—many who are underrepresented minorities—and hopefully inspire them to pursue careers in STEM.”

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Del Valle shared the joys and challenges of earning a PhD and pursuing a career in mathematics. “I described a little bit of what I do and how I use math and computers to simulate epidemics,” she says. “I also talked about how I’ve traveled all over the world to present my research and that I’ve been to the White House a few times on official business. In summary, we all have challenges, but we can overcome them if we study hard. I wanted them to know that if I succeeded, they can succeed too.”

Expanding Your Horizons co-chair Lina Germann agrees. “This event is important because it promotes not only STEM careers but women in STEM,” she says. “It gives the girls role models to look up to in addition to doing exciting, hands-on STEM activities.”

Germann says her biggest takeaway from the event is that similar events are needed in the community. “It is important for me, as I see the excitement in the eyes of girls that attend the conference,” she says, noting that she hopes to plan another event soon.

Two Expanding Your Horizons participants get a taste for a career in medicine. Credit: Virginia Lierz.