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Girl Scout outreach tradition continued with engineering workshop

Last month the student section of the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) offered its annual Making It Matter - Engineer for a Day engineering workshop to about 30 fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade Girl Scouts from the Glowing Embers Council. The six-hour Saturday event allowed the Scouts from Marshall, Battle Creek, Richland, Comstock, Coldwater, and Portage to sample a variety of engineering-related problems and activities. They also earned “Making it Matter” engineering badges for their efforts.

The Scouts, divided into three groups, participated in six events led by 12 WMU engineering students with several different engineering majors: Allison Porrett and Marjorie VanHoorelbeke (civil); Krisana Gutierrez and Aarti Valsadadia (industrial); Sarah Gerbig, Mallory Good, Diana Janke, and Barbara Vermeersch (mechanical); Danielle Boyd and Erin Bushman (paper), and Courtney Heath and Katie Risnes (chemical). Risnes coordinated the workshop.

The engineering students shared information about how they chose engineering as a career path and how they selected WMU as their school of choice. In the morning workshops, the Scouts designed butterflies using chromatography, solved a “radioactive” ping pong ball problem, and made paper. The afternoon workshops involved designing a roller coaster with a 12-foot-long piece of plastic tubing, building straw towers that could support a volleyball, and preparing packaging that would protect an egg from a 12-foot fall. Each Scout was given a raw egg and materials to design and build a container that would protect the egg from a fall. To test their packages, the Scouts dropped their eggs from the stair landing at the Parkview Campus. Some of the eggs survived. VanHoorelbeke, SWE president, said the activities explored aspects of chemical, aeronautical, paper, mechanical, civil, and construction engineering.

Opinions and ideas, please! Send your thoughts on this article or suggestions for future articles to the editor at jerrie.fiala@wmich.edu Thank you.