

Young women learn ?technology is a field for everyone?



By Brock Weir

They set out to break down barriers for young women like themselves interested in pursuing careers in the technology sector, and that is just what sisters Maya and Amanda Bishop did with Why Code Aurora.

Over 100 young women from Aurora's public and Catholic schools, and students from beyond our community, descended on Aurora High School for the panel discussion organized by students for students.

The sisters, both students at Aurora High School, brought together a panel of leading women in their industry not only to give tips on how to break into what is often seen as a male-dominated profession but to help break through glass walls and ceilings on their own.

?We had about 100 people turn out and it was really amazing to see them all,? says Amanda. ?At the same time, our speakers were able to make connections within their fields.?

Adds Maya: ?What I liked was how diverse the speakers were because I think it gave girls who came to the event a better understanding of how the jobs in tech fields are so different from each other. Iona Tucker, one of the people who works at Watt Pad, in her field, even though it was still in technology, it was based more around helping people so it shows how some of the jobs can be less about the programming, which some girls might find boring or confusing, and can be helping people, which they might want to do, while still being a tech job.?

Many of the 100 people who came out to Why Code Aurora submitted their questions in advance by text and it was up to Amanda to pepper the panel with a wide array of queries weighing on teens' minds.

There were a lot of questions on what courses they needed to take in order to make the grade, says Amanda, and whether maths and sciences are particularly important for pursuing a career in the tech sector.

?They said maths are really important and girls need to keep doing math all throughout high school and university because it is going to be essential in these fields,? says Amanda.

From Maya's perspective, what added to the excitement was the organic nature of the discussion.

The panellists, she said, didn't have anything prepared. They simply asked them to explain a bit about their profession, how they did their job, before turning to the questions.

?When answering their question they did have some interesting topics they talked about,? she says. ?Kate from IBM said in the meeting take a seat at the middle of the table because she finds typically, as she helps mentor people who are doing internships at her business, she finds that girls often don't feel comfortable going to the middle of the table and they will sit on the outside of the room. But, she said it is important to sit in the middle of the table because then you're involved with the discussion and people will hear what you have to say too.

?They have a realistic view of their careers. They didn't make it sound like it was this glossy fairy tale, but at the same time they said you can stand up in your career and do a good job with your career. It is a really good career to get into because it is a really interesting career that pays well.?

As they look back on the fruits of their labour, Maya and Amanda say the summit only served to reinforce their desire to pursue their dreams and they hope it inspired others to do the same.

?Going forward for me and Amanda, we just want to make sure we try and stay involved in this community,? says Maya. ?For the future, I want to be able to inspire more girls. We had a lot of nice feedback and we sent a survey out to everyone who ordered tickets online. 35 per cent said it was above their expectations and the rest said it met their expectations. All of the people said they were really impressed by the event and some of the parents said they wished they had something like this when they were in high school.?

Adds Amanda: ?For those who didn't attend the event, the main message ended up being that technology is a field for everyone and to work hard on those maths in particular and make sure this is an opportunity for you.?