

# Roche leads push to draw more women into STEM careers

**J**an Allen didn't have many female role models on her way to a career in technology. Now an engineer at Roche, she wants tomorrow's generation of women to have a different experience and to know they're welcome—and needed—in STEM careers.

Allen still remembers when she was in high school in the 1970s being excluded from math contests at nearby Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology. Back then, only the boys were allowed to compete. Now Allen is proud to say there are two women working for her at Roche who graduated from Rose-Hulman.

She and her Roche coworkers are working hard to add more women to their ranks. Key to the effort is giving girls exposure to science, technology, engineering and math at a young age and encouraging them to picture themselves in STEM careers.

That will happen at Passport to Hi-Tech, an event for girls ages 7-12 that takes place March 5 at Conner Prairie from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.



Now in its third year, Passport to Hi-Tech started in 2014 when Roche partnered with Conner Prairie and Women & Hi Tech, an association of local STEM professionals. The three organizations were looking for a way to give girls hands-on experience with technology. And they wanted girls to meet women who have STEM careers today.

Last year, Roche Process Improvement Engineer Melissa Lavella volunteered at the Roche booth, where she and co-workers worked alongside girls to make DNA models out of candy. They could

see how DNA is shaped and how it works, but the takeaway for the girls is that there are women who work in tech jobs. "Hopefully they can picture themselves doing the same thing," said Lavella, who is Women & Hi Tech's K-12 Outreach Chair.

Christi Garcia, who works for E-gineering in sales and business development and is Women & Hi Tech's Corporate Outreach Chair, also volunteers, working with Lavella and Conner Prairie to make sure the activities at Passport to Hi-Tech are fun and cross different disciplines. She noted that because families typically attend the event, there are some young boys in attendance, too. She sees that as a plus. "It's important for boys to see it as normal for girls to be involved in tech."

Women have come a long way in STEM since Allen graduated from IUPUI with a degree in electrical engineering and landed her first job. She worked as an engineer at a local engineering firm where the female support staff made copies for the male engineers. Even though Allen was an engineer, she had to make her own copies.

Situations like that are rare today, but women are still underrepresented in STEM fields.

Although women fill close to half of all jobs in the U.S. economy, they hold less than 25 percent of STEM jobs. This has been the case throughout the past decade, even as college-educated women have increased their share of the overall workforce, according to statistics from the federal government.

According to 2014 data from the U.S. Department of Labor, only 15.6 percent of chemical engineers are women. For civil engineers and electrical/electronics engineers, the figures are even worse, with women filling just 12.1 percent and 8.3 percent of the jobs in those fields.

Gender diversity is important in the business world and is especially important at Roche, where cultivating the STEM workers of tomorrow is essential to its mission, said Carole Puls, corporate and employee giving manager at Roche. Passport to Hi-Tech aligns perfectly with Roche's goal of exposing underrepresented populations to STEM careers.

Roche, which is the event's title sponsor, welcomes support for Passport to Hi-Tech from additional corporate partners. And support has been growing, said Gail Brown, the Conner Prairie program manager who oversees the event. The number of exhibitors at Passport to Hi-Tech grew from 18 in its inaugural year to 23 last year. This year, there are 30 exhibitors, and attendance is expected to hit 1,200, almost double the first year.

Allen touts the appeal of a STEM career by repeating three selling points to the girls and young women she encounters. "You can support yourself, you can see the world and you can help others. As an engineer or scientist you can invent things that will improve the lives of millions of people."

## Passport to Hi-Tech, sponsored by Roche

**Date and time:** March 5, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Location:** Conner Prairie Interactive History Park, 13400 Allisonville Road, Fishers

**Cost:** Free with admission to Conner Prairie

Passport to Hi-Tech offers a full day of experiences, from ongoing hands-on activities provided by companies, universities and organizations like the Girl Scouts, to scheduled events, including the "Chemistry is a Blast" show and talks given by women in STEM.

### Speaker Schedule (Located in Lilly Theater)

#### 10:45 am – How to be a Doer

Presented by: Mikaela Gilbert, Student, Kelley School of Business at IU Bloomington

As a senior in high school, Gilbert created a product called Chatter Eggs. The experience led her to attend Indiana University's Kelley School of Business, where she works toward getting Chatter Eggs to market.

#### 11:00 am – Chemistry is a Blast

Presented by: Eli Lilly & Company

#### 12:45 pm – Living on 'Mars' in Hawaii

Presented by: Jocelyn Dunn, PhD Candidate at Purdue University

From a young age, Dunn found herself dreaming of being one of the astronauts buckled in for a launch to the International Space Station (ISS) or beyond to an asteroid or the planet Mars. Recently, Dunn took on the adventure of living in a dome habitat on Mauna Loa volcano in Hawaii for a simulated Mars mission called HI-SEAS (Hawaii Space Exploration Analog and Simulation).

#### 1:00 pm – Chemistry is a Blast

Presented by: Eli Lilly & Company

#### 2:45 pm – You Go Green Girl!

Presented by: Lisa Laughner, Founder, President and CEO Go Electric

Laughner started Go Electric Inc., a green-tech firm developing energy services solutions that accelerate a renewable energy future. A veteran at creating technology startups, she was formerly Vice President of Rolls Royce Corporate Ventures. Go Electric is her ninth startup.

#### 3:00pm – Chemistry is a Blast

Presented by: Eli Lilly & Company