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Valley girls get technology push

Summer camp offers chance to learn skills

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GRAND CHUTE — When Elizabeth Halweg noticed that few members of her own gender were enrolling in the information technology classes she taught at Fox Valley Technical College, she set out to change things.

This week, as she looked around her on campus, she had hope that not only will more girls enroll in tech classes, but be a larger part of the local technical work force.

Gathered at FVTC this week were 75 girls in sixth through eighth grades who were exposed to technology fields from computer science to welding.

With \$8,000 committed from FVTC and \$2,500 from Plexus, a Neenah-based electronics manufacturer that works closely with the school, Halweg launched the first GirlTech.

Fashioned after a Madison Area Technical College program, it targets those girls who might not otherwise consider a career in technology fields.

"I have two daughters here and they're very excited to attend," said Kim Vandewall, a support specialist for FVTC.

Girls created a number of projects, including their own hand-held game called the Brain Game — similar to the flashing light version of Simon Says — for which they learned how to solder and build the housing.

Kaity Sagan, 14, of Appleton, was excited to hear about the program. She said it's been a welcome change to her summer routine and the absence of boys has been refreshing as well.

"You don't have guys messing in your way," she said. "It's easier to do stuff."
