

## Conference exposes students to opportunities in science, tech and skilled trades

Angela Gismondi November 14, 2019



DURHAM COLLEGE — Students from Grades 7 and 8 got to explore the fields of science, technology and the skilled trades at Durham College during the Expand the Possibilities: Young Women in Science, Technology and Trades second annual conference. The two-day conference, held at the Oshawa and Whitby, Ont. campuses of the college Oct. 22 and 23, focused on hands-on learning.

Over 600 young women in Grades 7 and 8 took part in a two-day conference at Durham College to explore career opportunities and get hands-on experience in science, technology and the skilled trades.

The second annual conference, Expand the Possibilities: Young Women in Science, Technology and Trades, was held Oct. 22 and 23 at the college's Oshawa and Whitby campuses in Durham Region, Ont.

“The premise was to broaden their exposure to technology, science and the trades, non-traditional fields that they might not have considered that they fit into,” said Rebecca Milburn, executive dean for the School of Skilled Trades, Apprenticeships and Renewable Technology

and principal of Whitby campus at Durham College. “It’s a very positive, inspiring two days. The energy is amazing.”

The event draws mostly students from the Durham District School Board and the Durham Catholic District School Board.

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— **Rebecca Milburn**

### **School of Skilled Trades, Apprenticeships and Renewable Technology**

“I hope students gain a few different things from the conference,” said Denise Stirton, program facilitator, cooperative education, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, at Durham District School Board, in an email to the Daily Commercial News. “I hope they take away key skills, understanding that women are needed in skilled trades, and I hope they will be inspired to seek out opportunities in high school to expand that knowledge.”

The first day was held at the college’s Oshawa campus and the second day was held at the Whitby campus. The conference featured two keynote speakers: serial inventor Ann Makosinski and contractor, entrepreneur and TV personality Kate Campbell. Ross Romano, minister of colleges and universities, attended the conference on the second day and participated in activities in the automotive shop.

Over 40 different workshops were held over the two days with a focus on being hands-on. Students were divided into small groups and tested water quality, created electrical circuits, built bat houses, patched tires, practiced coding in IT and used their chemistry skills to make little bouncing balls. The workshops were led by Durham College faculty members but also industry partners Gerda, General Motors, Organization of Canadian Nuclear Industries, Ontario Power Generation, the **Residential Construction Council of Ontario**, Siemens and Black & McDonald.

“Their exposure was quite varied,” Milburn noted. “The goal was always hands-on and we wanted them to build or make something that they could take away with them.”

The conference program aims to engage more women in science technology and the skilled trades.

“We hear in the news about the under representation of women in the skilled trades and so this exposes them to a potential career path that they might not have considered,” explained Milburn. “We also hear, day in and day out, the expansive need for skilled trade individuals.”

Representation of women in skilled trades currently sits around four to five per cent, she added.

“If you want to improve that and potentially address some of the skills needs we’ve got to inspire our women at a young age to think of these as career options that way you can address the gender inequity but also you can potentially address the lack of people to step into those roles,” Milburn said, adding the skilled trades, science and technology are traditionally male-dominated fields.

“The industry is crying out for more skilled labourers...we can inspire our younger generation to consider these options to help fill those gaps.”

In addition to students, teachers are also invited to the conference.

“We invite the teachers so they can be strong advocates for these roles and we try to involve all of our mentors who have a vested interest,” said Milburn. “The individuals who ran the conference and the workshops they all believe in their trade and they all want to share the possibilities with these young ladies by being out there in front of them, by being role models and mentors.”