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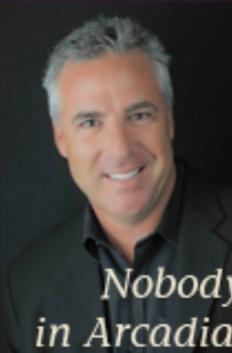
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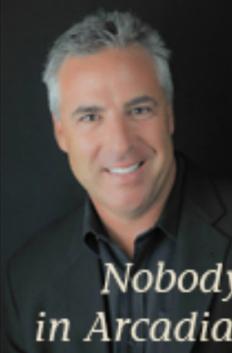
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Girls: The next generation of code

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Posted: Friday, January 1, 2016 12:00 am | Updated: 11:33 am, Fri Jan 1, 2016.

By Katie Mayer

Computers are hard to understand, boring and often stereotypically thought of as a “boy thing.”

That’s what Xavier College Preparatory junior Molly Luther once believed. Today, it’s a belief she is trying to change.

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After taking a mandatory computer coding class her sophomore year, Luther discovered her passion.

“I realized it was something I was good at and something I enjoyed,” Luther said.

Now Luther works to inspire other girls and young women to try coding and has become a local leader among her peers.

Luther said that if girls saw more young women and girls coding, “they would see how great it is.” Luther continued, “The stigma is that people who code are not fun or creative, but they actually are the most creative and innovative people.”

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Luther, whose former goals included a career in medicine, now works toward a career in technology and coding.

“By 2020, there will be approximately 1.4 million computer science jobs open, but only 400,000 will be filled,” Luther said.

Earlier this year, Luther participated in Girls Have IT Day, which is an annual event that helps middle school girls get involved with STEAM. STEAM stands for science, technology, engineering, art and math. The day features a guest speaker and more than 80 hands-on activities.

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Xavier computer teacher Catherine Wyman co-founded the annual Girls Have IT Day and said it attracts more than 1,000 students every year, including many from Title 1 schools. Wyman also started a Girls Have IT Camp, where Luther volunteered over the summer.

“She was an outstanding counselor and engaged the girls and helped them be successful and really enjoy technology,” Wyman said.

To recognize Luther and encourage the teen’s leadership in computer coding for girls, Wyman recently selected her to be an ambassador at Scottsdale software company Axosoft’s inaugural #ItWasNeverADress STEAM conference. The conference was a two-day event featuring speakers, hands-on practice and business plan creation for girls ages 12 to 17.

“I spent time with other girls – most of them younger than me – and went through a conference about how to get your voice heard about the importance of STEAM in education,” Luther said.

At the end of the conference, the ambassadors were encouraged to take their message into the broader community and make a difference, so Luther decided to share that message with her alma mater, Saint Thomas the Apostle Catholic School.

Luther recently outlined some recommendations to

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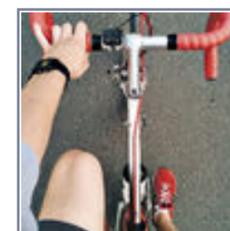
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Principal Mary Coffman and Assistant Principal Katie Zeches on some simple ways to incorporate additional computer-related activities into the coursework and programs at the school.

"Molly is extremely dedicated to this cause and she wants to inspire our students so when they get to high school, they already have a leg up on these activities," Zeches said.

Thanks to Luther's recommendations, Saint Thomas the Apostle Catholic School already purchased five new devices on which students can practice coding. The school is also looking at implementing another recommendation from Luther – an hour of coding event held every December.

"She is going to come and present to all of the students, as well," Coffman said.

Luther's other recommendations included creating a "math month" with competitions similar to traditional reading competitions as well as incorporating tech-related art projects, such as creations with LED lighting and other new technology.

"I just think girls don't really see enough girls in this field, so that kind of discourages us," Luther said. "I think we have this sort of girl power mentality, but when we don't see enough of us doing it, it's intimidating."

Zeches said she and her fellow faculty and staff members are proud of what one of their graduates has gone on to accomplish.

"We always want to give our alumni the opportunity to come back and we're so proud of what they've been able to accomplish once they leave here," Zeches said. "We would love them to be able to show our current students everything they did while they were here to show them what they can do now."

Luther said it has been rewarding to return to her alma mater and share her passion. She hopes to inspire more girls and young women to learn coding and broaden their career possibilities.

"Girls should realize that this gives us more of an opportunity to show how much more valuable we are and how much we can contribute to society," Luther said. "It actually gives us an edge."

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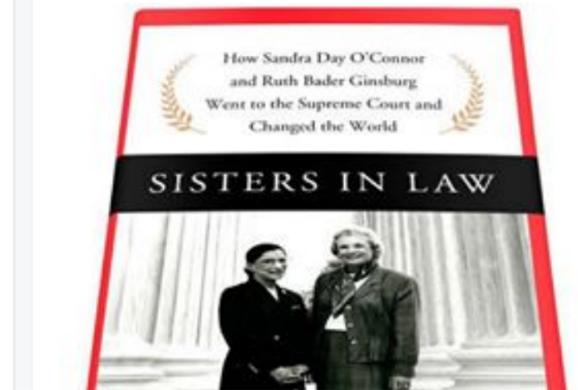
 

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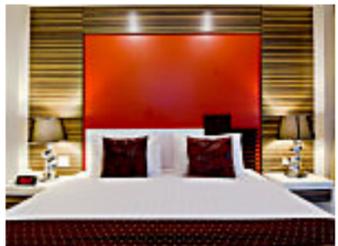
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