

Friday, July 1, 2005



Clarence Tabb Jr. / The Detroit News

**Willina Cain, 11, shows her Web site to her mother, Camille. Willina participated in a four-day camp that was designed to encourage young girls to consider careers in information technology.**

## Camp encourages girls to seek high-tech careers

Fewer women choose to go into the booming field and fewer rise to high-ranking jobs.

By Dalia Naamani-Goldman / The Detroit News

Giving up two weeks of vacation in California was a big deal for 11-year-old Willina Cain.

But the Detroit girl willingly sacrificed the West Coast's sunny skies for Michigan's humid heat this week to learn about technology and science.

"(It's) just 'cause I like making things," said Willina, a student at the University Preparatory Academy in Detroit. Willina joined 40 other Metro Detroit girls at a four-day camp at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield designed to encourage them to consider careers in information technology, a booming field that fewer women are pursuing and where fewer still are rising to top jobs.

"Being a woman and working in (the field), it's been very difficult to attract and retain women in our company," said Laura Carlisle, an AT&T vice president and camp volunteer. "You don't see enough female role models. Even within AT&T it's hard to find role models in other women."

In its second year, the event was sponsored by such corporations as AT&T, IBM, Sun Microsystems, GMAC and Ford Motor Co. The Michigan Council of Women in Technology organized the program.

The camp emphasizes computer technology skills and includes activities such as Web site building and creating robots. There were also sessions on bar coding and wireless telephone technology.



Clarence Tabb Jr. / The Detroit News

**Kayla Hawkins, left, Kierria Adams and Erica Parker were among 40 Metro Detroit girls who attended the workshop.**

### By the numbers

- The percentage of women in the IT work force fell from a high of 44 percent in 1996 to 32.4 percent in 2004.
- Women held 25.4 percent of professional and management jobs, about the same as in 2003.
- Between 2003 and 2004, employers hired men at a higher rate than women for IT jobs.

The camp focuses on attracting a diverse group of girls in grades four through seven, said Diane Cairns, camp director and program director of the Michigan Council. Tuition is free, but applicants must submit a letter of recommendation.

"We've seen in research where girls start forming critical decisions," Cairns said.

"We want to catch the girls in their formative years of what they want to do in the future," Cairns said.

Nationwide, women represent about 28 percent of those working in information technology, said Lucy Sanders, CEO of the National Center for Women and Information Technology in Boulder, Colo. That figure, which also reflects the number of women enrolled in information technology undergraduate degree programs, has been flat during the past few years, Sanders said.

Only 12 percent of information technology degree recipients at research universities are women, she said.

"Girls are opting out of educations and careers in IT in alarming numbers," said Sanders. "We see similarly shocking numbers in the workplace."

Though she could not cite specific numbers, Sanders said fewer women hold the highest information technology positions, such as lead engineers and designers.

Willina's mother, Camille Cain said the program has helped further her daughter's interests.

"Public schools are behind in technology education," Camille Cain said. "When (students) need it further down the road, they tend to be a bit behind."

*You can reach Dalia Naamani-Goldman at (313) 222-2536 or [dgoldman@detnews.com](mailto:dgoldman@detnews.com).*

- Women earn 22 percent of all IT degrees.

*Source: Information Technology Association of America*

### Related reports

- ▶ [Science camps prep girls](#)
- ▶ [Marney Rich Keenan: Women's brains may be different - but that's not the same as dumb](#)
- ▶ [Comment on this story](#)
- ▶ [Send this story to a friend](#)
- ▶ [Get Home Delivery](#)