



## EDUCATION

# CyberWatch teaches girls cyber security hands-on

By Kathy Park

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A group of local middle school students spent the day away from the classroom to work as identity theft investigators. It's an annual program geared at encouraging young girls to consider a career usually dominated by men.

From digital forensics to computer assembly, they learned all about cyber security from the professionals.

"Usually giving something physical, tangible for the girls to work with, gets them more involved and it's a good analog to cyber security issues," says Rose Kirby, a Lunarline employee. "We use it to talk about passwords, defense in-depth, different layers of security."

Middle school students from Montgomery, Prince George's and Howard counties all participated in the program at the University of Maryland. It's part of the annual "Cool Careers in Cyber Security for Girls Summit." According to Forbes, women only hold 27-percent of computer science jobs.

"We know that there's a real lack of the female population going into these fields so we try to let them sort of experience that it's not so hard," says Davina Pruitt-Mentle, executive director of educational technology policy at CyberWatch.

Sixth grader Mary Blee says she enjoyed the exercises.

"During school you think it's kind of boring, but when you sort of engage in it it's really fun," she says.

The lessons came straight from the experts.

"I love coming to events like this because there were so few things like that for me while I was going through school," says Kirby.

The program started eight years ago with just 30 girls and now it has grown to 350 participants, one sign that the interest is growing.

"I took technology at school for one of my classes and I got all A's on it," says Kady Diallo-Sligo.

"If nothing else they learn the proper security and safety measures that all citizens should know, but hopefully we can convince them to go into the field as well," says Pruitt-Mentle.

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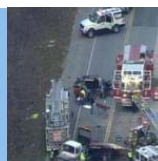
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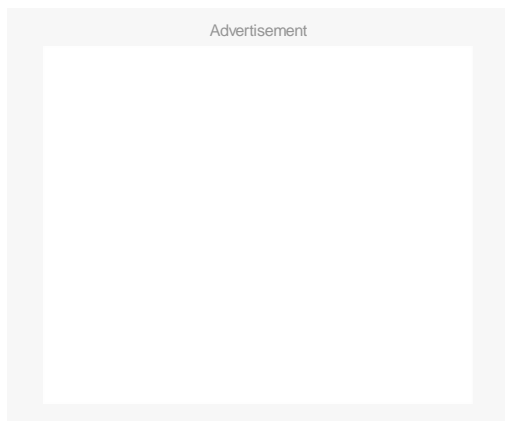
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