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H.R. MacMillan Space Centre brings girl power to spring programming

Vancouver, BC, March 18, 2013 – Girl power is taking over H.R. MacMillan Space Centre this spring with a speaker series focusing on Canadian women in science.

“H.R. MacMillan Space Centre is putting a different face on what scientists look like with the hope that more girls and women who attend the programs will realize that the sky’s the limit when it comes to career opportunities in this field,” said Rob Appleton, Space Centre executive director.

Maxime Chin, one of the Women in Science series speakers, admits to having faced the kind of impediments that can derail an engineering vocation, but believes that there is ample impetus for women to develop lasting and rewarding careers.

“In high school, my guidance counselor asked why I had registered in auto mechanics. I explained that it was the only course available that had hands-on experience that may be helpful for a degree in engineering. He told me that I should deregister for the course because there was a very long wait list of students and that I would be the only girl in the class. He also advised that I stick with science because engineering would be difficult for a girl in a class full of boys,” said Chin.

Fortunately, the discouragement Chin experienced early on lost its momentum when she served as co-director of GEERing UP! -- UBC Engineering and Science for Kids. There she worked to recruit female engineering mentors for girls outreach workshops and camps. The mentors opened her eyes to the possibility of becoming an engineer and showed her the fantastic opportunities available to her. She also observed that the mentors had well-balanced lives, were passionate about their work and were working on projects that helped improve the world.

She went on to study mechanical engineering at UBC and participated in co-op work terms where she gained valuable insight into what field work entails. She was often the only woman riding in the truck to the sites, eating lunch with the operators who were usually older men, looking at valves at the well head site, and having meetings in trailers. Sometimes she didn’t run into another woman all day until she checked in with the hotel receptionist at night.

She says there are good and bad experiences in the field, but the bad ones are those that tend to be shared and publicized more often, creating a stigma for women. She quickly learned that, in order to implement her ideas and projects, it was important to influence by using tactful and receptive communication.

“Working in industries such as construction and oil and gas, field work is inevitable and incredibly vital for advancing one’s career and gaining valuable experience. I have successfully implemented projects and influenced decision-making in the field by identifying what field workers value and presenting ideas that are focused on those values to motivate interest. I found that trying to “act like a man” in the field is neither helpful nor necessary. As a woman, I offer a different perspective on problem solving which is something I want to preserve,” said Chin.

She hopes educational outreach programs – such as those offered by the Space Centre – will give girls and young women fresh perspective and motivation, and shed new light on how exciting and diverse engineering can be.

“While I was at UBC building robots, the civil engineering students across the hall were building model bridges, and the computer and electrical engineering students were creating useful apps for phones. Being in an environment where everyone is always working on innovative new designs and collaboratively in teams to help people is inspiring,” added Chin.

The Women in Science speaker series is sponsored by APEGBC and TRIUMF. All sessions will be at the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Admission by donation.
www.spacecentre.ca.

April 11, 7 p.m. -- Dark Secrets of the Universe - Dr. Stéphanie Côté

From dark matter to dark energy

May 9, 7 p.m. -- Finding Your Path to Engineering and Science: From Taxidermy to Robots - Maxime Chin

Animal biology mechanical engineering: two different degrees; one successful path

June 13, 7 p.m. -- Transforming Human-Robot Interaction - Dr. Elizabeth Croft

Finding ways to help humans and robots to work together

The H.R. MacMillan Space Centre is a non-profit community resource that brings the wonders of space to Earth, while providing a personal sense of ongoing discovery. Through innovative programming, exhibits and activities, our goal is to inspire sustained interest in the fields of Earth science, space science and astronomy from a Canadian perspective.

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