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Camarillo girls show their web mastery in library program

By Mark Storer

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KAREN QUINCY LOBERG/THE STAR Isabella Renteria (right), a Las Colinas Middle School seventh-grader, gets one-on-one instruction from Shirin Salemnia, who teaches her Whiz Girls Academy at the Camarillo Library on Wednesday afternoon.



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LOBERG/THE STAR Jessica
Hernandez, a fifth-grader at
Dos Caminos School, attends
the second day of Whiz Girls
Academy Computer Coding
Series at the Camarillo
Library on Wednesday
afternoon.

A dozen girls are using their after-school hours to study more at the Camarillo Library, but instead of textbooks, pens and pencils, they are learning to write code.

Using funding from the library's Russell Fischer Business Collection, the students are taking part in Whiz Girls Academy. The program was founded by Shirin Salemnia, a Los Angeles entrepreneur whose company, Play-Werks.com, is creating online educational applications for youths.

The Camarillo students are learning HTML, which is the language used to make Web pages, as well as related coding such as cascading style sheets and more.

"I'm a big kid," Salemnia said as she began Wednesday afternoon's class. "I learned to write code on my own later in life. I wanted to start contributing in a positive way to young girls, so I started doing Whiz Girls."

Salemnia said that seeing the movie "Big" with Tom Hanks changed her life.

"I wanted to be a toy tester, and I did that. I worked with Mattel on Barbie, and I did branding for the Bratz dolls," she said. "I realized that those weren't positive influences, and I wanted to do more to help girls be involved in STEM programs."

STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

"The statistics are something like 20 percent of high-profile tech jobs belong to women," said Rob Paulis, the business collection coordinator. "We wanted to reach out into this community and use this fabulous tech lab we have to see if we can help meet that need, and we wanted to do that with girls at an age that will give them a chance to be interested."



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KAREN QUINCY
LOBERG/THE STAR Rob
Paulis (left), coordinator of the
Camarillo Library's Russell
Fischer Business Collection,
Shirin Salemnia (top right),
instructor of Whiz Girls
Academy and fourth-grader
Nia White look at her
computer screen as she
develops computer code in

Paulis said that at the informational meeting during which Salemnia spoke about the Whiz Girls Academy, more than 70 children and parents were on hand for what would become the initial 12 spots in the program. The girls chosen for the group because they represent the target that both Salemnia and the library wanted to reach.

develops computer code in the second class of the series at the library on Wednesday.



PHOTO BY KAREN QUINCY LOBERG, KAREN QUINCY LOBERG

KAREN QUINCY LOBERG/THE STAR Nia White, a home schooled fourth-grader, has a question on Day 2 of Whiz Girls Academy Computer Coding Series held at the Camarillo Library on Wednesday afternoon. The free program is taught by Shirin Salemnia twice a week.

The program began Monday and will continue on Mondays and Wednesdays from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. through Dec. 4.

Amanda Yaeger, 12, was excited to be at the second class.

"I like techie stuff, and this is a lot of fun," said the seventh-grader at Las Colinas Middle School in Camarillo. "I like making and creating websites, especially."

Amanda's dad, Mark Yaeger said that when he saw an advertisement, he wanted to get Amanda into the program.

"It's a wonderful opportunity to explore something that she's not really doing at school but that can make a serious impact," he said.

Mark Yaeger said he was exposing her to the science and technology learning as much as possible to see if she liked it.

"She enjoys video editing, too, and now's the time to support that," he said.

Paul Machian said he brought his 10-year-old daughter Rebekah to the orientation after receiving a brochure.

"She fell in love with it right away, and it didn't take her any time at all to decide she wanted to be a part of it," he said of the fifth-grader at Tierra Linda School in Camarillo



PHOTO BY KAREN QUINCY LOBERG, KAREN QUINCY LOBERG

Liliana Ruiz, 10, said she heard about the program from her teachers at Dos Caminos School in Camarillo


"I really like getting to learn on computers," she said. "We even did research into zodiac signs and got to play some games. It's really great."

KAREN QUINCY
LOBERG/THE STAR Dos Caminos School students Lily Kohlbeck (right) and her sister Emma attended the second day of Whiz Girls Academy at the Camarillo Library on Wednesday afternoon.

Salemnia said it was important to start learning computer programming at an early age to give the girls a chance to succeed.

"I learned late," she said, "and I want to get more girls exposed to this world earlier and get them excited about it."

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