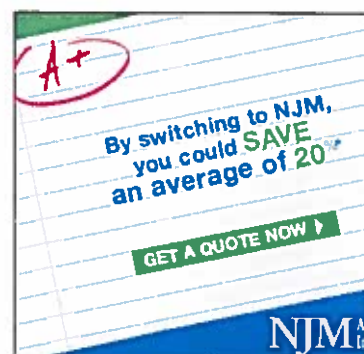


Willingboro students explore careers in 'Minorities in Engineering' program

By Kelly Kultys, staff writer Apr 9, 2017 1



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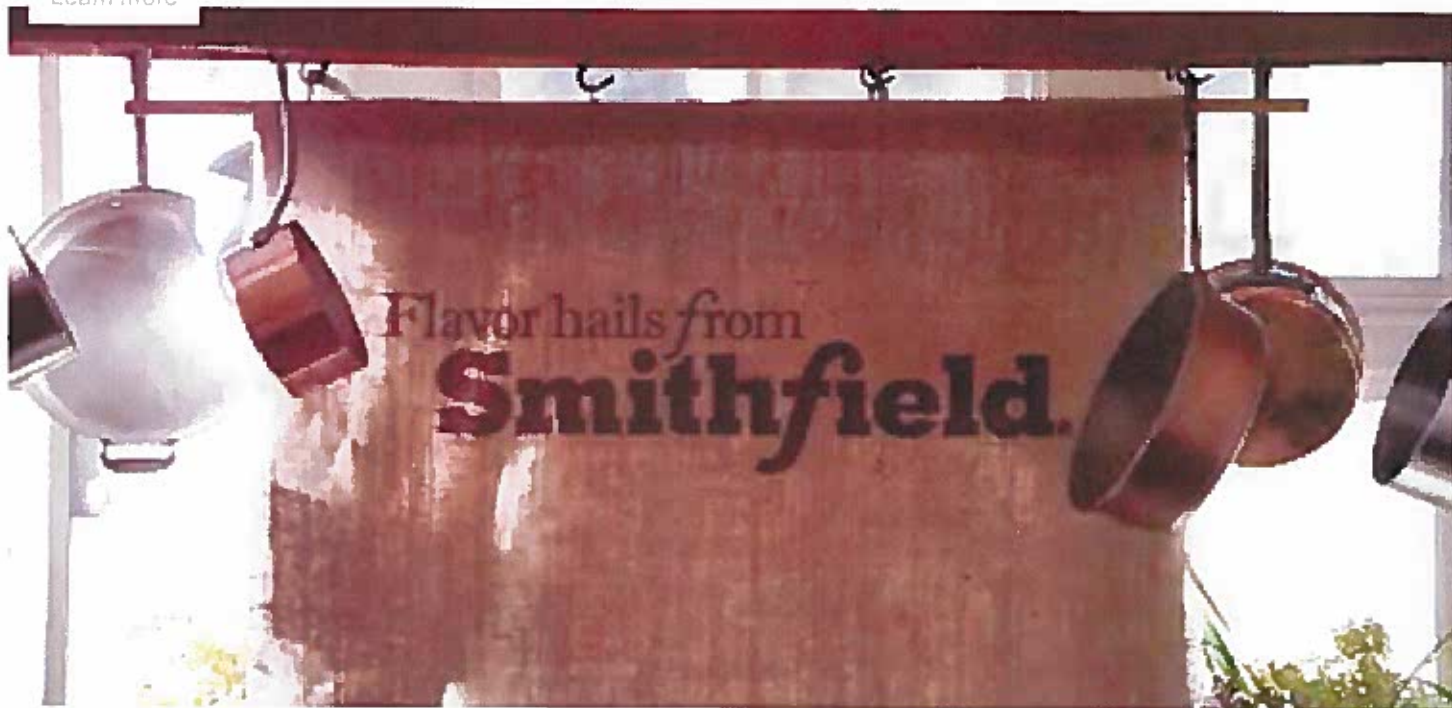
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Willingboro students explore careers in 'Minorities in Engineering' program

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An advertisement banner for NJM Auto Insurance. On the left, a red circle contains the text "A+" in red. To the right, the text reads "By switching to NJM, you could SAVE an average of 20%". Below this is a green button with the text "GET A QUOTE NOW" and a right-pointing arrow. In the bottom right corner, the NJM Auto Insurance logo is displayed.

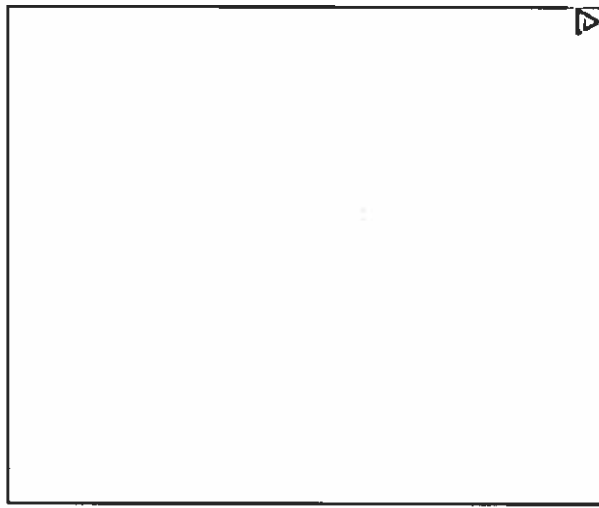




WILLINGBORO – Willingboro High School sophomore Bethany Ramsundar had really never heard of marine engineering until a few weeks ago. But as someone who loves the ocean, she was immediately interested.

"I didn't know they had marine engineering — making boats and submarines," Bethany said. "I never knew that, and that really intrigued me."

It became a natural subject for her assignments through the "Minorities in Engineering" program run through Lockheed Martin in Moorestown.



For seven weeks, Bethany, 16, and four classmates made the trip each Friday morning to the defense contractor's Borton Landing Road campus to take part.

The goal of the program was to give the students a hands-on experience with engineering.

In 2016, women made up about 23.6 percent of all engineering and architecture professionals in the United States, according to data from the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

African-Americans made up just under 6 percent of the employees in those fields, while Hispanic or Latino members represented about 9 percent.

The numbers were better for women who work in fields related to scientific research and development services, as they composed 43.7 percent in 2016. However, African-Americans made up just 6.5 percent of those fields, and Hispanics and Latinos made up about 8.5 percent.

Educators and industry leaders, with the support of national initiatives, have been working to bridge the gap and improve accessibility to the program.

The Willingboro students worked with others from Burlington City, Burlington Township, Delran and Moorestown to complete the main project of designing and building a robot and programming it to complete a course.

"You have to rely on other people as a team," Bethany said. "That was new, because I'm usually like so individual!"

For the Willingboro sophomores, learning the ins and outs of how to work with other students they had never met was one of their biggest challenges.

"You have to literally learn them while doing the job, so it was harder. But it was actually really fun," said Leia Haughton, 15.

The students also were required to pick a field in engineering, study it, and prepare a presentation for the last week of the course. The students from Willingboro chose everything from automotive to architectural to marine engineering as fields they wanted to explore.

"That's the main reason we all liked it," Bethany said. "Anything you're interested in, there's a field for."

Mia Teel-Neely, 15, said the program opened her eyes not only to new job fields, but also her communication abilities.

"I learned how to talk more," she said. "I can ask for help."

As they progressed through the program, the students gained an appreciation for all the hard work and effort it took to participate. Since the program took place Friday mornings, they were responsible for making up the work missed.

"At first, I was skeptical going to the program, but it was good," said Nehemia Claude, 16. "It was a good experience. It opened your eyes to different opportunities in engineering, like biomedical (and) architectural, and it teaches you how to work with other people."

Afterward, some of the Willingboro students said the combination of their coursework at the high school and their participation in the Lockheed program inspired them to want to continue to study engineering.

"Engineering is something I plan on doing in college," said Samuel Walker, 16.

For Bethany, the program really changed her direction.

"If you had asked me before the program, I would have said no. But because of that program and seeing how everything works out, I definitely think that's something I would do in the future," she said.

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