

STEM

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port, mentor and raise each other up.

"Being a woman in STEM can bring unique challenges, and students are going to have the opportunity to meet women who have learned how to navigate pathways to success," Paciulli said. "Please join us to talk, laugh and share your story in your STEM journey to help others."

Alysha Putnam, STEM Special Programs coordinator at Greenfield Community, said the #MySTEMStory event provides area community college women an opportunity to access knowledge to help them grow and develop.

"We become inspired, motivated and encouraged when we know that others like us have gone out and done it before," Putnam said.

Connie West of the Berkshire Community College STEM Starter Academy is excited for the opportunity to elevate the conversation about the importance of women exploring STEM fields in higher education.

"It is important, especially in Western Mass., to increase access and opportunities for women to go into careers in the STEM field, and every opportunity we have as educators to highlight this with our students will hopefully yield meaningful outcomes in the future STEM workforce for our region," she said.

To register, go online to tinyurl.com/MySTEMStory. Hors d'oeuvres will be served and a cash bar will be available. For more information, contact McGinnis-Cavanaugh by email to bmcginnis-cavanaugh@stcc.edu, Paciulli by email to mpaciulli@hcc.edu or Putnam by email to PutnamA@gcc.mass.edu.

IF YOU GO

What: #MySTEMStory**When:** Oct. 24, 5-8 p.m.**Where:** UMass Center, Square, Springfield**Cost:** Free; parking at

Town Square Garage, \$5

Registration: Online,tinyurl.com/MySTEMStory**For more info:** Email

Beth McGinnis-Cavanaugh

at bmcginnis-cavanaugh@stcc.edu, MelissaPaciulli at mpaciulli@hcc.edu

or Alysha Putnam at

PutnamA@gcc.mass.edu

Members of the Society of Women Engineers affiliate at Springfield Technical Community College recently. STCC is joining forces with other area community colleges in a regional initiative, #MySTEMStory, to connect female community college students with professional women working in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. (SPRINGFIELD TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE PHOTO)

SPRINGFIELD

Colleges hope #MySTEMStory will inspire

Forum focuses on encouraging women to enter field



Beth McGinnis-Cavanaugh, STCC engineering professor

"This will be an opportunity for professionals to inspire the next wave of STEM women by sharing their stories about successes, challenges, motivation and persistence in the STEM fields."

The four community colleges in Western Massachusetts are spearheading a regional effort to connect female community college students with professional women working in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. Registration is now open for the event, which is scheduled for Oct. 24 from 5 to 8 p.m. at the University of Massachusetts Center at Tower Square in downtown Springfield. The event is free, except for a \$5 parking fee at the Tower Square garage.

The Society of Women Engineers affiliate at Springfield Technical Community College and the STEM Starter Academies at STCC and the Berkshire, Greenfield and Holyoke community colleges

are sponsoring the networking workshop which is called #MySTEMStory. Organizers hope the event will help build a network for Pioneer Valley women in STEM.

The inaugural gathering will feature a panel discussion and question-and-answer session led by mechanical engineer Prasha Sarwate Dutra, a quality manager in a manufacturing facility in Rhode Island. She hosts a website and podcast called "Her STEM Story" to inspire women to pursue careers in STEM.

Beth McGinnis-Cavanaugh, a physics and engineering

professor and faculty advisor to the STCC chapter of the engineers' society, said #MySTEMStory creates a unique opportunity to connect STEM students and professionals.

"This will be an opportunity for professionals to inspire the next wave of STEM women by sharing their stories about successes, challenges, motivation and persistence in the STEM fields," McGinnis-Cavanaugh said. "We encourage professional women from any STEM field to join us."

McGinnis-Cavanaugh said many of her students have never met a profession-

al woman working in the male-dominated world of STEM.

"Many of our students enrolled in STEM programs are lower-income or first-generation college students with backgrounds that simply don't afford them access," McGinnis-Cavanaugh said. "They don't have necessary, meaningful connections to professional role models. We thought a networking event would be a wonderful way to help them make those connections. The women who are studying today at STCC, HCC, GCC and BCC are the future of the STEM workforce. We need to do all we can to provide the peer and professional support that will help them persist and succeed."

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Women in STEM: 2017 Update, women filled 47 percent of all U.S. jobs in 2015, but held only 24 percent of STEM jobs. Undergraduate degrees are evenly divided between men and women, but women

only make up about 30 percent of all STEM degrees.

Geraldine de Berly, vice president of academic affairs and chief academic officer at STCC, said the networking event reflects the college's focus on encouraging and nurturing women to excel in the STEM fields.

"I applaud the faculty and staff at the community colleges for their work in putting this important event together," de Berly said. "As the statistics show, women are underrepresented in STEM classrooms and related industries. We hope that #MySTEMStory inspires students and shows them they can pursue rewarding careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics after graduation."

Melissa Paciulli, STEM project administrator at HCC, said, "The vision we have for #MySTEMStory is to provide a place that will bring together STEM students, professionals and academics to help sup-

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