

Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of Gems and Honoring Founder Lauren Jenkins

This year is the 10th anniversary of GEMS, Girls Engaged in Math and Science, an AAUW Morgan Hill program founded by Lauren Jenkins to provide ongoing support for Tech Trek campers.

Lauren's first involvement with Tech Trek began when her own daughter Joelle attended the camp at Stanford as one of the first participants when Tech Trek, an AAUW CA project, began in 1998. Then in 2001 Lauren took over the position of branch Tech Trek coordinator from Jean Pinard.



Jean Pinard and Lauren at the May Brunch



A few years later, looking to expand the experiences available for the girls, she gathered a group of AAUW members together to discuss life after camp. The result was GEMS, a name coined by Nancy Altman for the girls club that Lauren had already started for Tech Trek alumnae.

Nancy recalls that "Lauren has always been passionate about science education and providing science experiences for all children, but she was particularly interested in engaging girls in science." Tech Trek and GEMS were an ideal fit for Lauren.

Lauren, who was regional director at the clinical genetics lab for Kaiser, also taught a class on DNA at the Stanford camp. Marie Wolbach, founder of Tech Trek, states, "Lauren was essentially a volunteer consultant who offered good advice as we planned the first camps. She taught the DNA extraction lab for all campers and used her contacts on campus to add a dimension of understanding about the real lives of female scientists, destroying stereotypes in the process. She was, of course, a great role model herself."



Carol Holzgrafe, a dorm mom at the time who later went on to be camp director, remembers, "Lauren's class vibrated with models and hands-on-tools that made the campers engage and remember what they learned. I remember the laughter in the class, so we knew the girls enjoyed themselves. Since she was with us during the early years of camp, her presence as a role model - a woman working in science - was even more important. Such women were less visible then than now."

As the group of GEMS grew, the Jenkins home became its clubhouse. All girls, whether they had attended Tech Trek camp or not, were welcome. New friendships were formed, as the girls dissected cow eyes, listened to female scientists, explored the world of forensics doing crime scene investigation, and participated in activities such as the ROV (remote operated vehicles) challenge sponsored by the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

Lauren turned over the job of Tech Trek coordinator in 2004 but continued with GEMS until 2008 when her work schedule became more demanding. GEMS was then taken over by Susan Oldham Fritts, although Lauren continued to lead occasional field trips for the girls.

Susan has successfully continued Lauren's vision that began ten years ago -- to provide enrichment activities that engage middle and high school girls in math and science.



Submitted by Donna Dicker