SciGirls approach is diverse, practical

By Iricka Berlinger
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The SciGirls are young, intelligent and love science just as much as any boy.

The two-week academic camp just for girls is a partnership between the National High Magnetic Field Laboratory and WFSU.

“We learn such a wide range of sciences,” said SciGirl Danielle MacVicar. “It really expands on things we learned at school.”

The all-female atmosphere takes a lot of pressure off the girls, Mag Lab Educational Program Director Pat Dixon explained.

“They don’t have to worry about how they look or feel that they need to hide their interest in science in fear of being perceived as un-cool.”

The application process gets tougher each year. This year 32 girls were chosen out of more than 80 applicants. Each girl must write an essay about her interest in science and have teachers send in letters of support.

“We try to get a good distribution of ages and schools,” Dixon said.

This year girls were chosen from schools in Tallahassee, Quincy and Bainbridge, Ga.
SCIGIRLS

They also took trips to Torrey State Park, Wakulla Springs, Maclay Gardens and new this year, Seacrest Wolf Preserve in Chipley.

The camp’s inspiration came from PBS’s Dragonfly TV, a television program aimed at girls interested in science. A grant from PBS made it possible for the camp to get off the ground for the first two years. Now in its third year, the camp is fully funded by the Mag Lab and WFSU, PBSJ, a engineering, construction and architecture firm, has donated money to keep the camp going for at least three more years.

“We try to organize the activities based on what the girls indicate on their application,” Dixon said.

This year, the activities included Florida State University’s Antarctic Research Facility, where the group got to experience the negative 23-degree Celsius temperatures of the storage room where scientists store specimens from the inhabited continent.

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They are very inclined with what we are about and what we do,” Victor Herrera of PBSJ said.

The girls easily make friends, as they already have similar interests. Dixon said, “believe it or not, they make lifelong friends in just two weeks.”

Above, Syliva Portillo surveys the land of Blueprint 2000’s Capital Circle Southeast project. Bottom right, from left, Lucy Toman, Kyra Gressel, Mary Robertson, Mary Grace Conroy and Maren Johnson learn about stormwater construction. Top right, SciGirls Madeleine Keenan, Kaitlyn Sisk, Emmaline Boyd, Brianna McCaffrey, Danielle MacVicar, Helen Law, Mary Dixon and Kayley Erickson excavate a mock-crime scene as they learn about forensics.

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