A thousand girls (and a few curious boys) converge on UW Bothell to learn hands-on about the awesome opportunities of STEM.

“What do you enjoy doing?” she asked the next girl in line. “You’re a coder? That’s awesome!” the astronaut cried, punctuating the praise with a high five as retired astronaut Wendy Lawrence – a member of the UW Bothell Advisory Board – smiled beside her.

The Inspire STEM Festival drew 1,000 middle schoolers, parents and teachers to campus on a blustery fall Saturday, offering up hands-on learning opportunities that sparked imaginations today and – hopefully – career dreams tomorrow.

“Our focus is on getting underrepresented and underserved communities into STEM,” explained Annette Anderson, Director of Curriculum and the founder of BWISE (UW Bothell Women in Science and Engineering). “By having these girls here in a college environment, they can see that women can pursue all types of pathways into science.”

Dozens of community partners gave kids plenty of chances to be amazed. Engaging with UW Bothell alumni and current students along with industry representatives, the middle schoolers examined the insides of a computer, used solar cells to power motors and tried out Google’s new glasses. They maneuvered a tiny remote-operated vehicle in a tank of water, felt the brush-like material inside a whale’s tooth and explored how the brain affects the optic nerves.

Lynn Hook, a senior computer scientist volunteering at the Adobe exhibit, said the festival was a great way to reach students who are just beginning to explore career interests.

“We are committed to getting students into using technology – in the classroom, sharing with their friends, in their careers, in life,” she said. “It’s especially important to invest this time in girls. There are not a lot of women in the industry and we want to promote it.”

THE LONG LINE SNAKED ACROSS the sidewalk in front of Commons Hall, a bevy of slightly soggy girls in rain jackets and hoodies excitedly waiting their turn for an autograph.

But it wasn’t pop singer Taylor Swift who drew such a crowd. It was Dottie Metcalf-Lindenburger, a retired NASA astronaut and one-time Washington high school science teacher who flew aboard the Space Shuttle Discovery in 2010.
“Science is one of my favorite subjects. I like discovering new things and doing stuff hands-on.”

DANIELA GARCIA
OLYMPIC VIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL, MUKILTEO

“It’s cool to come here and see all these things and get to work with them. I think I want to be an architectural engineer.”

ABHI KHANAL
NORTHSTAR MIDDLE SCHOOL, KIRKLAND