

Science Horizons —by Elizabeth McCartney, SAIC

“Expanding Your Horizons” conferences were developed by a group of professional women in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1974, who noticed a decline in the number of young women choosing careers in math, science, and engineering. They resolved to help stimulate women’s interest in such careers by organizing “Expanding Your Horizons” conferences. The conferences enable girls from middle schools to talk to female scientists, mathematicians, and engineers and learn from their experiences.

“Expanding Your Horizons” events are one-day conferences consisting of a series of hands-on workshops, mostly led by professional women. The workshop leaders are encouraged to talk about their careers, coursework that led to their degrees, difficulties they had to overcome, and what they enjoy about their careers. The girls choose four or five workshops to attend during the course of the day and listen to guest speakers who address the entire group. Since its inception in 1974, the program has grown to include 36 states.

The Missouri University of Science and Technology (formerly known as the University of Missouri, Rolla) has hosted an “Expanding Your Horizons” conference in Rolla, Missouri, annually for many years. Professional women working at the Rolla-based U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) are among the most active supporters of, and participants in, the program.

Women from the USGS Rolla Science Information and Library Services (SILS), the National Geospatial Technical Operations Center (NGTOC-Rolla), and the Mid-Continent Geographic Science Center (MCGSC) have for years provided workshops for the program, as did women from many other local businesses and government agencies.

In 2007, the USGS presented one of 14 individual workshops, “Lions and Tigers and Bears, Oh Where?!” The workshop was a hands-on introduction to how Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can be used to assist conservation managers in decision making.

ArcGIS software was used to view information from the USGS Gap Analysis Program as well as other map layers from the USGS. The young participants loaded map layers showing public lands, states, counties, water, and species. Using these data, they were able to determine which species were present in individual counties. They then participated in a group discussion of the factors affecting species distribution. The girls were also given information packets comprising a CD and a brochure containing information on careers in GIS and cartography [*Careers in GIS and Cartography*, CaGIS, 2003].

More than 50 volunteers worked to make the 2007 “Expanding Your Horizons” conference at MST a resounding

success. A record-breaking number of 586 seventh- and eighth-grade girls from Rolla and surrounding communities attended. The feedback was positive and enthusiastic. For more information on how you can make an impact on the lives of young girls through the Expand Your Horizons program, visit <http://www.expandingyourhorizons.org>. The site provides guidance on how to develop your own “Expanding Your Horizons” conference, lead a workshop, mentor a young girl, and much more.

