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Girls explore commercial real estate

Career mentoring program for 48 teens included an appearance by Mayor Beth Krom.

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FOR IRVINE WORLD NEWS

Forty-eight high school girls attended the "Crew Careers: Building Opportunities" commercial real estate mentoring event Saturday.

"I'm really glad I spent my Saturday here and not trouble making," Beckman High School student Ashley Rodriguez said. "They're teaching you how to go for a career, how when you graduate from high school you don't have to just work at McDonald's."

Non-profit group Crew-OC presented the event at Park Place Office Campus near Jamboree Road and the San Diego (405) Freeway. Women who work in all branches of commercial real estate shared career information with the high school girls from Girls Incorporated of Orange County.

The program was part of a nationwide effort by the Crew Foundation in its goal to help achieve diversity and equality for women in opportunity, influence and power and to help advance the success of women in commercial real estate.

Saturday, the girls were welcomed and introduced to the event by chairwomen Michele Babcock and Mary Figlioli. Figlioli gave the girls a brief lesson in completing a proper business handshake: grasp the whole hand firmly, don't pump the arm, look the person in the eye and greet him or her warmly.

The young women attended a rotating series of presentations on the career avenues of commercial real estate: Escrow, marketing, leasing, legal, property management, finance, design and construction.

Many of the girls expressed surprise at finding that things like marketing, architecture and interior design were such a big part of the commercial real estate industry. Several of the presenters told the girls that when they went to college, they had no idea what kinds of careers were possible in commercial real estate.

During one of the breaks, several veterans in the field talked among themselves about the changes for women in the past 20 years.

Letty Bierschenk, 78, said she was the first woman vice president of Caldwell Banker. She recalled a time when she had her male colleagues make calls for important contact appointments because a woman's voice did not carry authority over the phone.

Sharon Courtway and others commented how several areas of commercial real estate now seem to be dominated by women, including in-house legal representation and shopping center and small retail leasing.

The day was one full of information for the girls and encouragement to pursue opportunities and dreams. Irvine Mayor Beth Krom praised the Girls Incorporated program and spoke to the girls.

"There are just so many things we have power over in life, and creating opportunities for ourselves is one of those...there are no boundaries if you set out to reach a goal and are willing to put out the effort to get there," she said. "Money is not the only source of power and influence in our society."

Student Magdalena Velasco of Beckman High commented, "This program is really good. The new careers are really interesting and they are telling us we need to be creative and create things for ourselves."

Crew-OC is a member organization of the Commercial Real Estate Women Network and was established in the county in 1998. The non-profit group promotes and sponsors educational and professional activities for its members. Information: www.crew-oc.org.

Girls Incorporated of Orange County was established in 1954. It offers programs for girls in underserved communities to help them improve self-esteem and grades and to prepare for higher education, explore future career opportunities and become economically independent women. Information: www.girlsinc-oc.org.