Summer Camps Inspire Teens and Tweens Exploring Construction Careers

Girl Scouts attending the Akron, Ohio Chapter’s “Build it Like a Girl” week built a bench, and toured a local architect’s office and a construction site. Photo courtesy of Akron, Ohio Chapter.
For most students, summer means sleeping in, relaxing and hanging out with friends. But for some industrious young women, summer means hands-on learning about construction in a potential career path that’s fulfilling and fun.

In 2017, NAWIC chapters across the country invited junior high and high school girls to construction camps that give them practical experience in the world of construction.

Chapters from Baltimore to San Diego hosted camps. Read on to see how members of each chapter tailored the event for their local area and their chapter’s capabilities.

**Camp NAWIC, San Diego**

The San Diego Chapter has held Camp NAWIC for a decade. Last summer, 27 high school girls attended the five-day camp. San Diego also offers separate tracks for new and returning campers. The camp is designed to kindle interest in construction industry careers and introduce campers to trade skills.

Linda Young, CBT, CIT, says, “Commitment is the key to our success. Eleven years later, and we have our original partners and committee intact.”

Young is the president of Future Construction Leaders of San Diego, a 501(c)3 set up to support the San Diego Chapter’s Camp NAWIC and other youth outreach endeavors.

**Build it Like a Girl, Akron**

The Akron, Ohio Chapter took a different approach, hosting a “Build it Like a Girl” week at a local Girl Scout camp. This event was designed for middle school girls who all earned their Girl Scout badges by the end of the week.

Campers learned how to make project plans, use tools and complete a project. They also built a bench, and toured a local architect’s office and a construction site.

“The chairperson was the only one who committed to being at camp all five days.”

**Camp NAWIC, Greater Kansas City**

The Greater Kansas City Chapter’s Camp NAWIC has been going strong for seven years and hosted 21 campers in 2017. The camp gave high school girls hands-on opportunities to learn the basics of safety, carpentry, electrical, painting, plumbing, concrete and welding. Campers also took a field trip to a construction
site and heard female speakers who work in all sectors of the construction industry.

“We take pride knowing our camp finds women to teach each trade,” Alise Martiny, the Greater Kansas City Chapter’s Camp NAWIC Chair, says. “Yes, the guys are there too. However, the participants are inspired by the female instructors.”

**Camp NAWIC, Baltimore**

The Baltimore Chapter opened their camp to a wider age range, welcoming 16 girls in 7th to 12th grade. During the week the girls tackled hands-on activities, learned about different construction careers, visited a makerspace and did a job site tour. The chapter teamed up with a corporate sponsor, Baltimore Gas and Electric, to put on the camp.

“The main hurdle is finding a location where campers can be dropped off and picked up that also can serve as a classroom,” Jennifer Sproul, LEED AP, Baltimore’s Camp NAWIC Chair, says. “If you have one main corporate sponsor who will provide this, it will be so much easier.”

**Cost and Time Commitments**

The costs associated with hosting a construction camp vary. San Diego spends $10,000-$18,000 each year, depending on the cost of materials. About half of that amount comes from donations and the other half is paid for by the chapter.

Akron spent $800 on its event, which was paid for entirely through donations. Baltimore and Greater Kansas City also cover their entire camp budget through donations, $2,200 and $4,300 respectively.

The time commitment to put on a camp can vary. Akron’s “Build it Like a Girl” week requires two to three planning meetings and several hours of preparation. For larger camps, chapters agree that planning should begin about six months in advance.

“We have a committee that meets monthly,” says Martiny. “Each month the committee spends no more than six hours total until the month before the camp. Then about two to four hours are spent each week ordering materials, securing donations, recruiting volunteers and securing locations for the camp.”

**It’s Your Turn**

Chapters who have hosted camps encourage other chapters to give it a try. The groundwork has been laid, and plenty of girls in your area are looking for a chance to explore their potential in construction.

Sproul says, “Do it! It’s easy to copy another chapter’s weekly plan.”

“Share ideas with other chapters,” says Young. “And remember—it is for the girls!”

For tips on setting up your own camp in 2018, see “Host Your Own Summer Camp” on the adjacent page.
Host Your Own Summer Camp

Once your chapter decides to host a construction summer camp, it’s time to roll up your sleeves and get to work. Here are some tips to get you started:

1. **Talk to a chapter that has successfully hosted a camp.** Chapters who have hosted camps are a valuable resource. They can share advice and steer you away from pitfalls.

2. **Form a committee to plan the event.** Start planning at least six months in advance, and be sure to assign specific tasks to members.

3. **Find a venue to host the camp.** You’ll need a place to accommodate your campers and any scheduled projects. Local trade schools or construction businesses are a good place to start.

4. **Develop a camp program and schedule.** This is the blueprint for your event. It helps you know how many volunteers you’ll need and gives you an idea of costs.

5. **Set a budget.** A budget will help you keep spending under control and provide a fundraising goal.

6. **Raise funds.** Recruit sponsors who can donate money, materials, tools, safety equipment or swag. Also find sponsors who can host a lunch or two during the camp. Local construction companies and trade unions may be interested in supporting you with funding or in-kind contributions.

7. **Recruit partners and volunteers** who are willing to teach campers, host job site tours or oversee other activities. Start with your chapter’s members and member companies. Check to see if there are any tradeswomen groups in your area, as they are a good source for teachers. And be sure to reach out to local construction companies and trade unions for help.

8. **Get insurance for your event.** NAWIC’s special event insurance excludes construction camps, so you will need to contact a local broker and purchase your own insurance.

9. **Arrange transportation.** If your program includes any offsite events such as job site tours, you’ll need to arrange for safe transportation.

10. **Set up a camp page on your chapter website.** On the page, include information for campers, volunteers and sponsors, along with forms and registration materials.

11. **Have regular monthly meetings** to evaluate progress and spot problems early. As the date of your event approaches, you’ll be meeting more frequently.

12. **Recruit campers.** Contact area schools, the local Girl Scout Council, STEM programs and local home school groups.

13. **Take care of the paperwork.** Have campers’ parents sign permission slips. Volunteers will need to sign waivers, while campers must read and sign your camp rules.

14. **Hold a volunteer orientation.** Before the camp starts, hold a meeting or conference call for your volunteers. This will help them understand their responsibilities and get their questions answered.

15. **On the first day of camp, hold an orientation and safety talk for campers.** Here, campers learn about camp rules, how they are expected to behave and what they can expect during the camp. The safety talk should be an overview of basic construction safety practices. Specific safety guidelines should be presented before each project or event.

16. **Celebrate a successful camp.** End the camp with a fun celebration that showcases the girls’ completed projects for parents and volunteers.

17. **Thank your volunteers and sponsors.** A simple note or phone call thanking them for their assistance will end their experience on a good note and encourage their future support.