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GIRLS WHO CODE WORKSHOP TAKES CHS

ST. CROIX, USVI— On Wednesday, May 8th, a group of young ladies attending the St. Croix Central High School convened in a classroom and engaged with featured Girls Who Code presenter, Aimee Sanchez, who shared her knowledge and expertise in coding using the Scratch program.

District Coordinator of Technology Dr. Everett A. Ryan coordinated the event, first of its kind within the St. Croix School District.

The one-hour awareness workshop was conducted in partnership with Aimee Sanchez, University of the Virgin Islands (UVI), College of Science and Mathematics grants manager, who facilitates a Girls Who Code club at the UVI, Albert Sheen Campus. In 2018, Sanchez first launched a Girls Who Code club on the St. Thomas UVI campus.

Girls Who Code focuses on three components: sisterhood, coding, and impact. Sisterhood is geared towards creating a supportive environment for collegiate women. "It is important for us to be ourselves and support each other doing things in common," said Sanchez.

Coding involves learning and building programs on the computer. The impact component involves each club choosing a project that they are passionate about that will impact their community. Students use technology and what they learn to create something meaningful to them and the community.

Sanchez began by her presentation by explaining the fundamental tenets of Girls Who Code and then transitioned into students' hands-on use of Scratch. After providing instructions that included inserting sprites (computer images) within the interface and adding scripts to program the behavior

of the sprites, the participants had the opportunity to personalize their coding projects through the insertion of one or more sprites, sounds, and programming scripts, to include loops—having a sprite repeat a behavior more than once.

Along with the student participants, in attendance were the Department of Education Acting Assistant Commissioner Maria Encarnacion, Acting Deputy Superintendent Dr. Carla Bastian and school-based personnel from several public schools.

"I was able to try a little bit of the coding. And I know you can't learn everything in one short session, but it was an eye-opener. I really encourage those of you who are here, to tell your friends, so more of you can get involved in coding and computer programming because the opportunities are endless," said Acting Assistant Commissioner Maria Encarnacion.

At the close of the session, Sanchez selected a couple of female students and asked them to share their experience. "I learned how to insert music using coding. It was a lot of fun," said 9th grader Miajah Benton.

As a next step, Dr. Ryan explained that his goal is to continue to collaborate with Sanchez and to work with school personnel to establish a minimum of five Girls Who Code clubs within the school district. The Girls Who Code organization seeks to close the gender gap in computing and technology while building a pipeline of future female engineers and technologists.

The Girl Who Code program typically spans for 15 weeks. Part of the curriculum involves online coding tutorial for learners as they progress through various levels from beginner to advance. There are also activities that help students learn about real-world computer science development. Another part of the curriculum provides spotlights of females from various backgrounds who are in technology careers, and finally, there is a built-in teamwork component.

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