Who are the Geek Girls?

by Judith Underwood

A year ago I found myself in a "Social Media" quandary. I knew that for my primary business, real estate, getting up to speed on how to "do" social media was key to surviving the downturn in our economy.

Like many moms in my age group, I look to my kids to keep me up to date on computer stuff. Not that I am a newbie. We had (room size) computers at my undergraduate college back in the early eighties. Later in that decade, I worked for a long time with physicists so I had "email" and "instant messaging" back in the day.

Ironically, I was working at MIT when the World Wide Web (the www) first came out – yet here I am now, a working mom on Cape Cod who didn't know the first thing about "tweeting."

Into my life walks Leslie Fishlock, a super high energized woman with compassion, patience and endless knowledge and connections. She introduced me to "Geek Girl Camp," whose mission is to "educate and empower every girl and woman at every age level, on every skill level, at every income level on computer technology with fun and provide a legacy by giving back and paying it forward."

I have happily attended Geek Girl Camp '09, and '10. This computer "Boot Camp" has given me control over my social media. I can now tweet, blog, etc… not that I regularly do, but I can if I want to!

Perhaps most importantly, my new knowledge has made my 9-year-old girl proud – plus she gets to wear the Geek Girl Camp Survivor t-shirts!
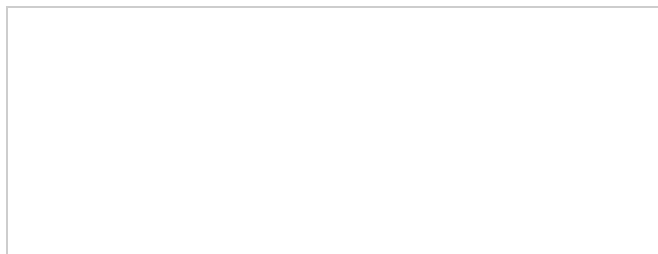
Geek Girl Boot Camps are technology "unconferences" for women of all ages and knowledge levels. Women take classes on everything to do with computers, both PC and Mac. Speakers cover general topics like the Internet and marketing, as well as workshops geared toward specific concerns like consumer electronics, software, social media, Photoshop, blogging, podcasting, digital photography, and more.

Leslie started "Geek Girls" in March of 2008, on her birthday. On her website, she writes, "I just became so frustrated hearing stories of woe from bright, articulate women who did not know the basics of computers and the Internet… Like my Mom. And my girlfriends. And female clients."

She wanted to put together something for the "average wannabe geek girl." She envisioned an environment where no one ever has to feel silly about asking the wrong question, "and getting laughed at by some 19-year-old pimply know-it-all World of Warcraft cretin. With braces. And a Marilyn Manson t-shirt."

With help from her friends, she created Geek Girl Camp. She says it's for "the other 80% of women who do not live their lives at MacWorld conferences…This is for the average gal, the beginner, the intermediate and even the advanced who wants to be involved."

"It's for paying it forward," Leslie says. "Helping out, having fun and feeling empowered."

Advertising Director Judith Underwood lives in an old farmhouse in Harwich Center. A Realtor and mother of two, she is also a playwright and poet.

Her plays have been performed in the Tennessee Williams Festival at the Provincetown Theater, where she is a member of the Playwrights' Laboratory. Judith has also been a finalist annually since 2007 in the Eventide Arts Kaplan Playwriting competition.

Visit her website here

GEEK GIRLS:

- Educate and empower girls and women at every age level, on every skill level, and at every income level with computer technology skills, making learning fun, and providing a legacy for women by giving back and paying it forward.

- Is a volunteer organization comprised of dedicated women in tech who own their own successful businesses and who want to continuously give back to the communities they live in.

- Offer Help Desks at events to assist everyone attending with computer assistance and other tech questions, to build awareness of and comfort with technology among women and teach them not to fear it.

- Provide full-day educational Boot Camps that are chock-full of core computer, Internet and social media workshops, ranging from Beginner PC skills to programming in jQuery, all taught by professional Geek Girls.

- Partner with local women's groups, unemployment agencies, non-profit organizations, agencies serving women in transition, and local schools to provide educational scholarships and resources for girls and women of all ages, to help those who need it most reach academic achievements and learn new job skills.

- Support and provide scholarships for Geek Girls who want to take workshops, classes and attend computer technology and Internet conferences so that our organization keeps on learning and we are able to continue to teach and give back.

- Run a Laptop Donation Program in which they volunteer their time refurbishing laptops that can then be donated to women in need.

- Provide nonprofits with free seminars, workshops and advice, and run an annual Extreme Geek Makeover Contest where the winning nonprofit organization receives a full tech and marketing makeover to help them optimize their limited resources.

- Provide daily computer tips and informative blog posts every day on their website Provide incredible resources on our website and through our Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn pages to encourage women and men to make technology their friend and learn how to use it to make their lives better and easier.

- Run an Online Help Desk through their website, encouraging people to Ask the Geek Girls a Question about computer technology, following up with a personal email from one of the team with answers and recommendations.

www.geekgirlcamp.com