

Preparing Women for a Digital Future: Meet Michelle Schuler

By Jim Golembeski, board member

I met Michelle Schuler in 2014 when we were organizing what is now the [NEW North Digital Alliance](#). Michelle had taken six years off from her business career to raise her children, and she was ready to reenter the workforce.

As she went through the networking process, Michelle discovered two important realities:

1. Everything was going digital, and
2. There were a lot of high level, professional women who did not know each other.

In addition, only 24% of computer related jobs were held by women. Furthermore, women comprised only 5% of the leadership positions in that growing field. Those facts led to the formation of *Women in Technology Wisconsin*.

Michelle and Kathy Fredrickson, UW-Oshkosh College of Business, soon organized [Women in Technology Wisconsin](#). A LinkedIn announcement quickly gathered 75 members in NEW North, and 150 women attended the first WIT event in April 2016.

WIT Wisconsin's mission is forward looking: a non-profit organization aiming to attract, grow, and retain women of all ages in technology-related careers in all industries. The last ten years have only proven how prescient this effort was.

Only 18% of undergraduate technology degrees are received by females, one of the highest gender disparities in course subjects. Northeast Wisconsin has been way behind other areas in the use, application, and training opportunities in computer technology. WIT Wisconsin has been an important step in closing that gap, and Michelle Schuler has led the way.

Today, WIT Wisconsin has three pillars: WITatWork, WITonCampus, and WIT4Girls. All are efforts to drive change by focusing on computer technology and by breaking stereotypes that women cannot take advantage of career opportunities in technology.

WITatWork has created a network of women professionals across the state and established connections with companies to promote career opportunities.

WITonCampus has matched over 60 female students from 15 different colleges with female technology professionals. These connections lead to internships and employment opportunities for the students.

Perhaps the biggest impact has been with WIT4Girls. By providing mentorship early and often, WIT4Girls creates memorable impressions on young girls. Continuous outreach at the elementary school level provides guidance and support for young people interested in technology careers. Career awareness and computer coding events instill interest and

confidence in computer science in young girls as early as middle school. Such experiences are likely to play a key role in developing a future, skilled workforce.

One WITatWork professional member summed up her experience like this: “This organization has been a way for me to connect and collaborate with individuals I may not have found through other organizations. I have been able to mentor a college student through the WITonCampus program and help lead some of the WIT4Girls events at a local middle school.”

Today Michelle Schuler is a collaborative partner at TiletownTech, and she leads *TechSpark*, an initiative of Microsoft that works to promote economic and workforce development in NEW North through computer science education, job skilling, digital equity and access, and support of the startup ecosystem. In NEW North, over 80 NEW Manufacturing Alliance members have upskilled more than 1700 employees, leveraging Microsoft Skills for Jobs, free LinkedIn Learning Career Pathways training in Professional Management, Business Analyst, and Generative AI. NEW Manufacturing Alliance also partnered with Goodwill Industries NCW to offer Digital Literacy training for member company employees.

Michelle’s initiative has influenced professional women, college students, and teenagers to prepare for the digital future.