

# Focus on STEM fields aims to meet growing demand

Colleges introduce students to science, technology, engineering and math early

By NATE DOUGHERTY

**F**or five days this summer, local high school students worked side-by-side with experts in the field of optics as they learned the intricacies of the industry.

The program, hosted by the Rochester Regional Photonics Cluster and Monroe Community College, was meant to give students the opportunity to explore career opportunities and get an introduction to one of the region's growing economic sectors.

But the Optics Summer Sizzler also reflected a larger trend as local colleges and universities increase their efforts to introduce students to the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

"Things like the Optics Summer Sizzler are great because optics can be really hard to explain to people, and this allows them to see it in action," says Anne Kress, MCC president.

The efforts on the part of MCC and other local colleges and universities are more than an attempt to enroll students in STEM programs. They also address what is seen as a field where demand for workers has exceeded supply.

The U.S. Department of Commerce's Economics and Statistics Administration noted in a 2011 report that businesses often express concern about a scarcity of STEM workers.

The department found that over the last

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The idea of the Women in Engineering program at RIT is not just to expose female students to STEM but also to present opportunities that traditionally have been lacking, says Jodi Carville, director.

Photo by Kimberly McKinzie