

Wanted: tomorrow's tech heads

Conference, Web site target Delaware teens

By **TAMARA CHUANG**
Staff reporter

Tech Summit 2000, sponsored by the Delaware State Chamber Partnership and the Wilmington Enterprise Community, put on a flashy show for 1,300 high school students Thursday.

The aim wasn't just to wow the students with cool gadgets such as NASA space suits, free ultrasound exams or iMacs. Instead, dozens of businesses hoped to draw students into technology careers to end the shortage of high-tech workers in Delaware.

"Our members came to us and asked us to do something about their need for more workers," said Melanie L. George, vice president and executive director of Partnership Inc., the education division of the state chamber.

"Our members need more employees. They wanted us to get into the schools to start the kids off early."

Last fall, a count revealed that 20 of the largest firms in Delaware had 500 job openings in information technology, according to state officials.

During the past year, Delaware has started several technology initiatives to deal with the worker shortage. Last month, the state's economic development department introduced a Web site at IThinkDelaware.com to help IT companies post job openings and to lure young tech workers to the state by showcasing the beaches and nightlife.

On Thursday, the department announced it would soon launch a second Web site to target teens, at www.WhatsIT.com.

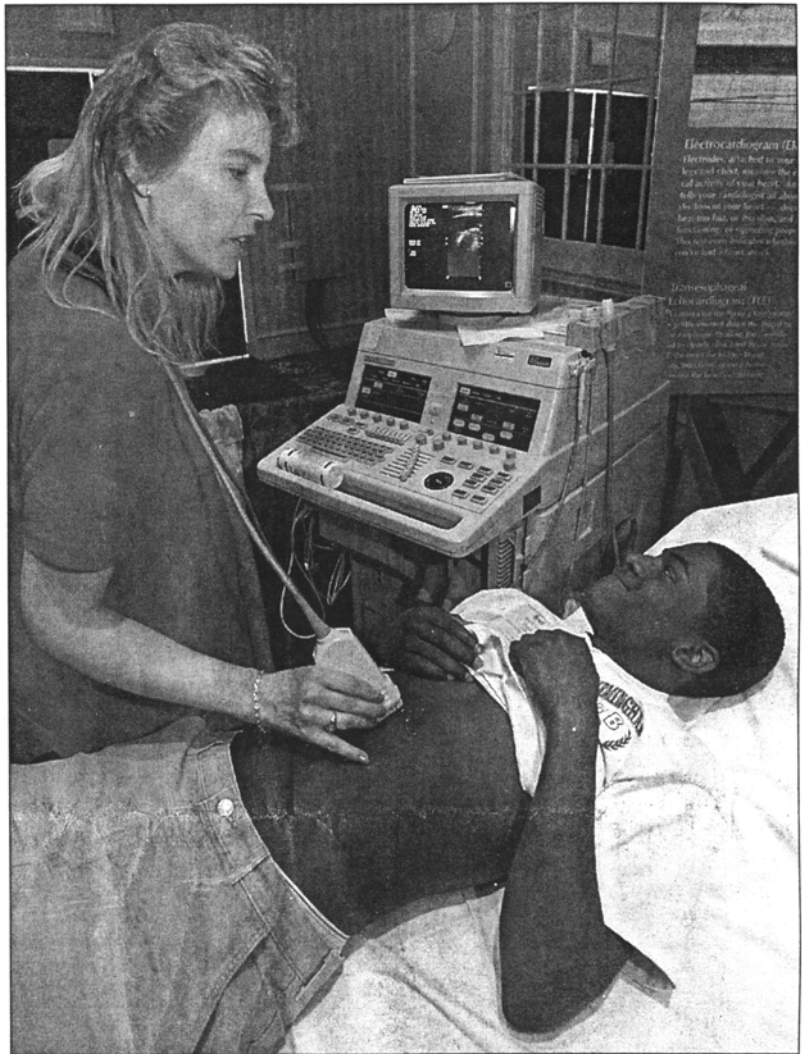
Tech 2000 continues today at the Riverfront Arts Center with exhibits in health care, space, biotechnology, information technology, aeronautics and visual arts. The conference is open only to high schools that pre-registered. Another 1,500 students from 17 area high schools are expected today.

Organizers hope to expand the conference — held for the first time this year — to southern Delaware in 2001, George said.

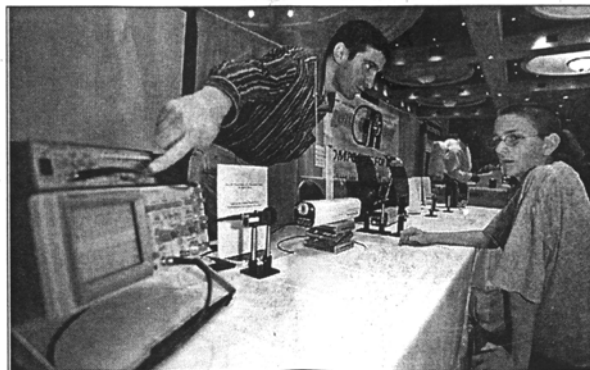
Some exhibits were more popular than others, such as Rodel Inc.'s silver ball that the firm's researchers used to demonstrate static electricity.

"In the semiconductor industry, we can't tolerate static," said Dave Roderick, a senior researcher. "You can't have a spark or else it will damage the chip."

A giant mechanical arm hoisting two rubber balls in the air at another booth caught the attention of Jay Moody, a freshman from Delcastle High School



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ABOVE: Nurse Rebecca Deever demonstrates an ultrasound machine Thursday on Christiana High student Bruce Taylor, 14.

LEFT: Bernie McGuinness of DelState's Applied Optics Center shows a laser to Howard High student Chadd Hamm, 15.

with a penchant for basketball.

"I saw the balls and liked the way it looked," said Moody.

The robotic arm, named MOE for miracles of engineering, was designed and built by students with help from DuPont Co. for a national robot basketball competition last week. MOE was built to throw the balls into a basket 6 feet above the floor.

MOE came in fourth, said Herb Eggert, development specialist for the DuPont Co.

"The competition was held to get students interested in engineering," Eggert said, hoping to attract participants for next year. "There are some students that are obviously interested in engineering," Eggert said.

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