BOTTOM LEFT: Professionals from the North Country Section and colleagues from the University of Vermont joined to present a Speed Resume event that combined resume reviewing and mock interviewing. The idea was to give students the experience of an interview in a safe setting where it didn’t matter if they “choke.” They had a list of questions from the professionals and could write their own questions based on their experience. The event garnered a lot of positive feedback, including comments about the importance of preparing for interviews and how appreciative the students were for the experience the professionals gave them.

TOP AND ABOVE: Reaching Girl Scouts with Wind Power and Roller Coasters

The collegiate section at Clarkson University has held a Girl Scout event for 30 years, and it continues to grow every year. This year the 60 girls who participated took over a hall at the university with a different room for each activity, including designing a car to run on chemicals and seeing the power of air.

The Hartford Section hosted a Girl Scout STEM event for girls to earn a SWE patch by building hovercrafts, indoor slingshots, and roller coasters. Girls learn teamwork skills by using pipe insulation, cups, Popscicle® sticks, rubber bands, tape, and marbles to replicate the same issues that roller-coaster engineers must resolve.
Renewing its focus on interactions between professional and collegiate sections while concentrating on professional development and networking were the main goals for Region F this fiscal year. Each professional section was encouraged to have at least one joint meeting with an area collegiate section, a concept that led to some interesting options for professional development. As a side benefit, these joint meetings allowed stronger sections to reach out to several smaller and less-developed sections with advice and encouragement.

Attracting new members and reaching inactive members with fresh ideas brought new energy, with several sections surveying underserved demographic areas. For instance, the surveys ask what type of events people might like, and the idea of “Networking 101” came up repeatedly. This input led to an event featuring a talk on how to develop elevator networking, which is essentially a 60-second pitch about the role you could play in a prospective company.

Region F has also seen the benefits of making the most of social media. Announcements, awards, member recognition events, and other region news items are posted regularly along with Twitter accounts and hashtag tags. Plus, many administrators and sections post news on their Facebook pages. To determine whether this approach is working, the number of views is noted. For example, a summary of the region conference was posted, and in a short time 150 people had already seen it. The region is also using Dropbox to share documents, TweetChat to prompt discussions, and Google Hangouts, which region collegiate representatives have used with their sections. Advocacy and recognizing the accomplishments of members, additional Region F goals, also benefit from the use of social media; for instance, establishing a section recognition program to recognize collegiate award recipients through Facebook.

A comfortable setting to bond mentors and mentees

Because mentoring is an ongoing goal for Region F, considerable thought has gone into the challenge of matching mentors with mentees. The New York State Capitol District Section implemented a program of small bimonthly dinners for eight people, featuring a guest speaker from industry. Each dinner has a topic determined by the speaker’s skills and career path expertise. Attendance is limited so that attendees can communicate easily with one another. Participants are asked to bring a question related to the evening’s topic. On arriving, they write the question on a 3-by-5 card, which is placed in the center of a table. The guest speaker’s talk is designed to encourage conversation. If there is a lull in the discussion, questions are selected from the pile. While response has been “fantastic,” this activity is regarded as one that could translate well to collegiate sections, too.

Pairing collegiate women with young girls

Another aspect of mentoring takes place between collegiate women and pre-adolescent girls in underserved local communities, which is the purpose of the Strong Women, Strong Girls organization. The Tufts University Collegiate Section leveraged this event in several ways — to reach out to young women and to promote SWE’s name and message among their fellow students by requesting their help. Tufts members of Strong Women, Strong Girls lead activities for the young girls and have the opportunity to mentor them and show them the value of engineering. This particular outreach event emphasized gravity and air resistance with hands-on experiments and also included music and food. While the event informed the young women about engineering and possibilities they might otherwise not be aware of, it also increased SWE’s visibility in the university community and raised awareness about the importance of outreach.

STEM is Phun

An inner-city STEM charter middle school in the vicinity of the New England Shoreline Section became the recipient of a pilot program funded by Region F. STEM is Phun is a spinoff of the region’s Girl Scout badge workshop, “Physics is Phun!” held in Rhode Island and Connecticut. For this outreach, 87 students and two teachers at the middle school came together every Wednesday in January and February to meet role models involved in STEM careers. Students heard their stories, learned about science, and had the “phun” of hands-on activities related to each specific area. This program was duplicated at another middle school a few months later with 391 fourth- to eighth-grade students participating.

Feedback from the students indicated that they were engaged in the activities. For a Force and Motion outreach, they built catapults with miscellaneous resources and shot marshmallows at a target. Responses ranged from “This event was good because it helps people understand science” to “I learned ways to launch stuff and how to make it work right.”

Breaking Barriers

The Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Collegiate Section co-hosted a Breaking Barriers event with the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, the National Society of Black Engineers, and the Society of Asian Scientists and Engineers. The event included a dinner followed by a panel that answered questions from the audience. This year men were invited to participate in the discussions and thus had the opportunity to understand why it is important to support female engineers and organizations such as SWE. Much of the conversation centered on structuring a successful career and a successful relationship with another ambitious person and finding that perfect balance without compromising either part of your life. The panelists allowed the audience to ask personal questions, which resulted in higher engagement and a more positive review of the event. The 46 attendees gave thoughtful and affirming feedback and appreciated the panel’s honest responses.