



CHIHIRO KOGA

**Lolita Villanueva** from Los Altos High School throws a punch during a self-defense workshop at the Girls for a Change Summit last week.

## Girls' day out

FEMALE EMPOWERMENT IS FOCUS OF RALLY FOR MIDDLE, HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

By Julie O'Shea

**I**t clearly was a day of female empowerment—1,200 middle and high school girls rallying for social change, 500 successful businesswomen speaking about overcoming corporate barriers and a band called, appropriately enough, "Cleavage," rocking out.

The San Jose Convention Center provided the bustling setting for last week's second annual Girls For A Change Summit, which brought together young women from around the Bay Area to discuss social issues facing their communities and ways to fix them. Roughly 100 teens from Mountain View and Los Altos are participating in the program this year.

The conference was the kickoff for a series of community-based projects the girls will undertake over the next year. Last week's event included more than 50 different workshops, such as "You Go Girl! Cracking the Glass Ceiling and Stepping Up," aimed at giving teen girls the skills, resources and inspiration to create a difference in the world.

"The workshops were really inspiring," said Rebecca Wallace, a freshman at Mountain View High School. "Personally, I'm into philanthropy... and home-

lessness. It's so sad to see so many people in the street when it doesn't have to be that way."

Coming back from rocking out in the mosh pit during the lunch hour's musical entertainment, Alma McLean, a senior at Mountain View High raved, "Being surrounded by girls—it's just been a very positive experience."

When you write about it in the paper, please make it sound good, so people know how amazing it is," added McLean, who just moved to Mountain View from Chicago this school year.

The rest of those at her table nodded in agreement.

"I think it's been fun," said Miranda Henely, a freshman at Mountain View High. "I heard about it at the Mayor's Youth Conference," adding with a laugh, "My brother actually didn't want me to come because he thought it was going to be one of those crazy feminist groups."

Hardly.

Girls For A Change was started after a study found that 87 percent of girls surveyed in Santa Clara County had dreams for their future but felt that they didn't have the resources and support needed to achieve them.

The program is designed to give these girls a chance to change what they see wrong in their neighborhoods and communities. Girls who show strong leadership skills are tapped to participate in the program by their classroom teachers. Placed

in teams, the teens have roughly 12 months to prepare and implement a social change project for and about girls.

Some of last year's projects included a health fair, a recycling program and a self-esteem conference.

"If I had had women role models helping me understand social change—how powerful that would be," said Lori Fraser, the director of employee communications at National Semiconductor, one of the event's corporate sponsors.

"This stays with these kids. That's another reason I got involved. I just wanted to make a difference," said Fraser, who acted as the coach for the Graham and Crittenden Middle School team last year.

Walking to an afternoon self-defense session, Los Altos High School juniors Lolita Villanueva, Alazais Duprat and Sara Berrospe were excitedly recounting a belly-dancing workshop they had attended that morning.

"She was overweight, but was comfortable with it," Villanueva commented about the woman who had led the dance workshop.

The girls all said they assumed this woman danced for a living and were surprised to hear otherwise.

"We asked her," said Berrospe, "and she said 'Actually, I'm a lawyer.'"

This little exchange, said the three friends, is testament to the fact that women can wear many different hats.

The pillars of the San Jose Convention Center were plas-

▶ See **DAY OUT**, page 9

## DAY OUT

▶ Continued from page 8

tered with words of wisdom from some of society's most prominent female leaders.

On one posting, author Louisa May Alcott notes: "I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning to sail my ship."

A few feet away was a statement from Virginia Woolf, another contemporary novelist, whose

mantra truly captured the spirit of the day: "As a woman, I have no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world." ▀

E-mail Julie O'Shea at [joshea@mv-voice.com](mailto:joshea@mv-voice.com)