Scott Weiler was a long-term substitute for a math and science teacher when he encountered "a brilliant student who had the chance to do a bit more work to get an A."

He was surprised when she chose not to do the work and recalls, "I asked her what her career goals were and she said she wanted to be the assistant manager at a Jack in the Box."

"It was so specific that I asked why. She said her mother did it, and it provided a good living for her family. I realized she only knew what she had seen from the best female role model she had."

Weiler, who earned a master's degree via the College of Education Teachers in Industry program in 2015 and worked with engineers and scientists, realized there was a disconnect.

**STEM Stats**

In fact, women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) jobs earn 33 percent more than those in non-STEM occupations and experience a smaller wage gap relative to men.

Realizing the importance of role models, Weiler wanted to show girls how exciting and gratifying a career in STEM could be.

This prompted Weiler, now a teacher of engineering, robotics, coding, and video production — he calls it a "mouthful, but a great conversation starter" — at Amphitheater Middle School, to create an organization called Girl Power in Science and Engineering that connects girls to mentors in STEM fields.

Some of the Girl Power activities include a mentor lunch with female engineers and scientists. The mentors discuss their careers and what it means to be a woman working in STEM.

There also is a series of field trips for the girls to see what it would be like to have a job in STEM. The girls then have the chance over the summer to attend engineering summer camps free of charge.
**Born to Be an Engineer**

Always drawn to science — "I was just a curious person and science made it all make sense" — Weiler says his earliest career aspiration was to be a veterinarian. "Astronaut was pretty high up, too."

He earned a bachelor's degree at Louisiana State University. "I was in the Air Force ROTC program and started in veterinary medicine. I switched to computer science, but my degree is in foreign languages (German) and philosophy. I started working in tech and sales, but I knew I had to do something else. So I went to a website for careers and said I'd move anywhere in the world."

Two weeks later, he got a call from a recruiter and began teaching in Korea.

He started working at Amphi Middle School in 2011 as a math interventionist, but says, "Teaching engineering is the best. I was born to be an engineer. There are very few days that don't feel like play for me. I don't know what I'd do if I had to do traditional lessons."

And this brings us to the Tucson Pumpkin Toss, a hurling competition held every fall on the UA Mall, using different types of catapults to throw pumpkins for distance and accuracy. The toss is a way to teach science, engineering, math, and teamwork, while having the thrill of throwing things that explode on impact.

Not surprisingly, Weiler's Math Engineering Science Achievement Club at Amphi has won the state championship for two years in a row. He adds, "We win by hard work, determination, and showing up when no other middle schools come."

**More than the Great Pumpkin Toss**

The Pumpkin Toss Championships are hardly Weiler's only claim to fame. He recently received the Henry Ford Teacher Innovator Award, which was presented to just 10 teachers from around the U.S.

He also received the 2016 Honeywell Educators at Space Camp Award and the 2016 Teacher Teckie Award from Cox Communications.

Last year, he took home the American Society of Civil Engineers Teacher of the Year Award and the WISE (Women in Science and Engineering) 2015 STEM Educator of the Year Award.

Reflecting on his career, Weiler notes, "I have no doubt I'd be a teacher, but this excellent journey started with Teachers in Industry."

The program pairs coursework at the UA with paid summer employment in Arizona STEM businesses to allow teachers to earn professional development credits or a master's degree. One of the main goals is to help teachers bring real-world STEM industry experience into their classrooms.

Weiler adds, "It is an amazing program." 

*Girl Power in Science and Engineering:*
www.facebook.com/groups/girlpowerengineering

*Amphi MESA and Robotics:*
www.facebook.com/groups/amphimesa

*Teachers in Industry: www.teachersinindustry.arizona.edu*