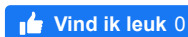


TV competition seeks female engineer, paper clip optional



By [Jordan Gass-Pooré](#) - Spring 2015 Feb 19, 2015



Lee Zlotoff, creator of the television series “MacGyver,” and Megan Smith, chief technology officer with the Office of Science and Technology Policy, answer a question about gender bias in engineering jobs at the launch of “The Next MacGyver” contest Thursday at the National Academy of Sciences. SHFWire photo by Jordan Gass- Pooré

WASHINGTON – Growing up on a farm in Kansas, [Ruth A. David](#), now president and CEO of the public research institute [Analytic Services Inc.](#), didn’t know it was possible for a woman to be an engineer.

Then, as an undergraduate math major who had become bored with the subject, David met with a

recruiter at her school, Wichita State University, who offered her a scholarship and a part-time job if she would major in electrical engineering.

“I’ve never looked back,” she said Thursday at the launch of the crowdsourcing competition, “[The Next MacGyver](#),” at the National Academy of Sciences.

“I fell in love with the discipline, the applied problem solving, the opportunity to create things that hadn’t before existed, the opportunity to build things used by others – it’s a wonderful profession. It’s exciting, it’s important,” she said.

But from 2004 to 2014 the number of women pursuing science and engineering bachelors degrees has decreased by 19 percent, according to a recent report by the [National Student Clearinghouse](#).

That’s why “The Next MacGyver” was created. The contest, sponsored by the [United Engineering Foundation](#), is seeking ideas for a scripted television series featuring a female engineer as its lead character.

[Mario Armstrong](#), “Today Show” digital lifestyle expert, said this character will inspire young people – especially women – to pursue careers in engineering. It will show them what it’s like to be a problem solver today, much like the lead, Angus MacGyver did, in the 1980s series “[MacGyver](#).”

The show followed the adventures of MacGyver, a fictional government agent, who resourcefully used his engineering skills to solve problems. He often used paper clips in inventive ways – to defuse a bomb or start a car, for example.

Three panels of judges from the engineering, entertainment and academic fields will review submitted ideas. From these ideas, five winners will receive \$5,000 each and be paired with Hollywood producers to develop a TV pilot script.

Media are important in the effort to increase the number of women engineers, said [Megan Smith](#), the country's first female chief technology officer with the Office of Science and Technology Policy.

There were no female engineers on TV when Smith was a child, and she said she experienced gender bias from her grandfather, an engineer, when she decided to major in engineering as an undergraduate.

“He told my mom, ‘Why would she want to do that?’” said Smith, who comes from a long line of engineers.

A female engineer may have been beyond her grandfather's imagination, but Smith said people can get past gender differences.



Anthony E. Zuiker, creator and executive producer of the television series “CSI,” celebrates the launch of “The Next MacGyver” contest Thursday at the National Academy of Sciences. Zuiker is a mentor on the project. SHFWire photo by Jordan Gass- Pooré

She said her grandfather was so proud when she graduated with an engineering degree that he bragged about her choice of profession.

“The Next MacGyver” wants to do for engineering what the TV series “[CSI](#)” did for forensics.

[Anthony E. Zuiker](#), “CSI” creator and executive producer, is one the competition's mentors. Zuiker said he didn't imagine that skipping basketball to

watch the Discovery Channel series “[The New Detectives](#)” would change his life – and a profession.

The episode of the forensic docudrama that he watched showed forensic services personnel pulling a long blonde hair follicle from a car headrest and using it to solve a crime.

This was the inspiration for the then-29-year-old Las Vegas tram driver’s first TV script.

Zuiker said that’s how “The Next MacGyver” can work, too.

“One idea, that great, iconic character that can really change the face of the industry,” he said.

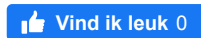
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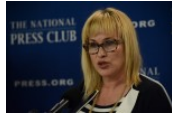
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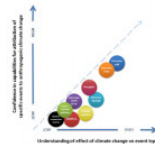
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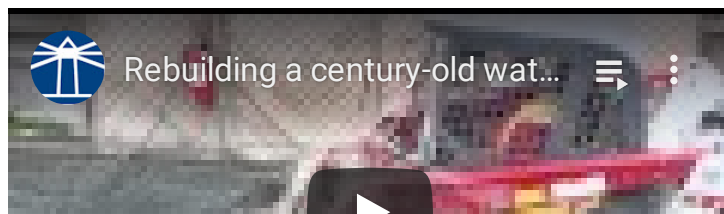


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