Written by Jane Alexander, Editor-In-Chief
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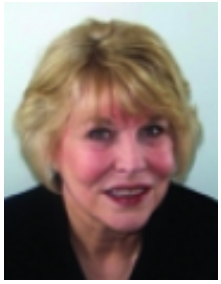

I probably wasn't the only SEC football fan keeping tabs on the recent NFL Draft. Those of us who love and support the schools of the Southeastern Conference were blessed with quite a few young men to root for over the course of seven selection rounds.

What an impact the SEC had on this year's draft! After all, as we keep hearing, ours is the go-to conference for any kid (make that of the "male" variety) who dreams of a future in the pro-football ranks.

Congratulations to the many hardworking guys (regardless of college team and conference), whose numbers came up during the draft or will be picked up soon by the NFL. But, as the title of this column indicates, my shout-out isn't about them…

It's about another winning program that's being generated (pardon the pun) down in the Southeast: If you're not already, let me acquaint you with the "iCan Girls in Engineering" initiative (iCan), sponsored by Alabama Power/Southern Company. Run by a team of the corporation's female engineers (a team, according to www.icanengineer.com , that's currently made up of graduates of engineering programs at Auburn, The University of Alabama, The University of Alabama at Birmingham and Mississippi State), its goal is to encourage middle-school girls to consider engineering as a career path. Team iCan does this by helping girls understand what engineering is about, what engineers do and what great engineering roles are out there for them to tackle—
and, in the process, change the world.

Like football players, not every girl in this program will see her engineering dream become a reality. On the other hand (if you can stand a few more puns), those who do get and stay fired

up as a result of iCan's activities could have a very bright future ahead of them: There will be plenty to do in our increasingly higher-tech society—*one that's already going begging for top-notch technical skills.* As Bob Williamson and Ken Bannister regularly remind us, we need to be powering up a workforce to operate and maintain tomorrow's engineering-based industries TODAY. That means sparking the interests, the passions and the innovative mindsets of our children (boys *and* girls) ASAP.

To iCan, I have to say, "You go, girls!" To Alabama Power/Southern Company, kudos for nurturing these winners! On behalf of many in the maintenance and reliability community, I'll go out on a limb and thank you profusely for putting your money where our hearts are.

Sorry to report, though, not everyone has gotten the memo about the need to grow a technically advanced workforce. In my March column, I promised to update you on the saga of David Pietras, the uncle of our Assistant Editor, Greg Pietras. As you may recall, Uncle David was the cabinetmaking instructor at Richland Northeast High School (RNE), in Columbia, SC. His course was one of the shop classes put on the chopping block to make way for new health-science and culinary-arts offerings.
Despite vigorous 11th-hour pleas for a reprieve, let's just say the ax finally fell at RNE. **MT**

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PS: We've made it easy for you to tell us about any efforts that your organization supports to encourage children toward the pursuit of technical careers. Go to MT's May online "Question of the Month" at www.mt-online.com/question . I certainly hope we hear from you!