**You can be cool and you can be smart”**

**By Joseph Frederick** *| Associated Press*

Kelly Mathews is on a mission. She wants to get more girls interested in STEM. That's short for science, technology, engineering, and math. For Mathews, it's a mission that begins at home. She has a 9-month old daughter, Marilyn.

"I want her to look at things and wonder how they tick," Mathews says. "And know that if she looks at something and says, 'Wouldn't it be cool if it could do that?' that she can make it do that."

That's why Mathews reads books like "Rosie Revere, Engineer" to Marilyn. She stocks her daughter's nursery with other such books. One is "HTML for Babies."

Mathews is a software engineer in Chalfont, Pennsylvania. She believes the earlier girls are introduced to these fields, the better the chance they will pursue those careers.

That's a belief that is gaining support in the education and business communities. The U.S. Department of Commerce estimates women make up less than 25 percent of the workforce in jobs related to STEM. The acronym was coined by a member of the National Science Foundation in the 1990s.

Mathews has teamed up with TechGirlz, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit. It aims to bridge the gender gap by teaching middle and high school girls about careers in technology.

Mathews is one of only two female engineers in her company. She feels her message is simple.

"You can be cool and you can be smart," and that girls "don't have to choose sides."

Kelly Parisi is spokeswoman for Girl Scouts of the USA. She says her organization has been working to empower girls in science since its inception. That was way back in 1913.

Parisi says the Girl Scouts offer more than 30 STEM badges. They include coding to engineering to computer science.

Mathews hopes that by starting early, her daughter will know a career in STEM is within her reach.

"If she wants to, and if she doesn't want to that's great too. I just want her to know what's out there."