

Women team up to study sexism in tech

Group heads to 25 cities to probe gender bias in technology field

By Tara Deschamps



Alicia Close was stunned when she heard about female geologists in Alberta that were fired — and it had nothing to do with the recession, their seniority or experience.

“They were told it is better for you to be at home than for a man to be at home,” Close, who has worked in fintech for five years, says.

The anecdote was just as upsetting for Close as tales she heard of Maritimers yearning for more opportunities to develop coding skills and young tech graduates out west grappling with domestic violence and harassment, affecting their careers.

Their stories are part of the reason why Close and her crew at Vancouver-based non-profit Women in Tech World will crisscross the country in an RV this fall.

After departing Vancouver on Sept. 5, they’ll stop in more than 25 cities, including Toronto, Waterloo, Regina, Whitehorse and Winnipeg, to empower

women and investigate how they’re treated in technological fields.

By the time their crowdfunded trip ends in Newfoundland in early November, they hope to have enough research and data to compile a report with recommendations on stamping out sexism and the barriers to female success in the tech industry — a phenomenon they say has rarely, if ever, been studied this exhaustively in Canada.

“From the States, we know that in the first one to two years of working in the field, 45 per cent of women drop out. We don’t have stats like that here,” Close says.

In community forums reaching more than 10,000 tech workers and industry stakeholders, Close expects to hear “there are a lot of issues around sexism and no role models, and not seeing any women at the top.”

Sixty-six per cent of North American tech companies have none or just one woman on their boards and fewer than 12 per cent have three or more women, Boston-based **Vell Executive Search** found in March.

But what Close hopes their journey will really reveal is that “tech is an amazing industry to be a part of and women should be getting the support to stay in it.”

Dora Vell is the CEO of Vell Executive Search, a premier retained technology executive search firm in Boston. Ms. Vell is an internationally recognized expert in recruiting technology executives including: CEOs, COOs, CTOs, CMOs, CROs, board members and others. She works with VC-backed, PE-backed private companies and public companies. She can be reached at dora@vell.com.