

Women in tech refute Nashville's low ranking in new study

Lauren Lowrey

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Nashville, TN (WSMV) – A recent study ranks Nashville near the bottom of the list for “best cities for women in tech.” The study, released by SmartAsset, considered four factors: the gender pay gap, earnings after housing costs, women’s representation in the tech workforce and 4-year tech employment growth.

Out of 59 cities listed in the study, Nashville ranked 41st overall. The top five cities were in and around Washington, D.C.

“I would disagree [with the study],” says Meg Chamblee, President of Women in Technology of Tennessee. “We rank at or above the national average in 3 of the 4 metrics that they used to determine that list.”

WITT is a non-profit in Nashville focused on getting more women into tech fields. It provides scholarships into traditional and non-traditional students, as well as outreach programs for K-12 students.

Chamblee also serves as Executive Vice President for Tennessee UDig, a technology consulting firm that develops technology for companies, data strategy, architecture and analytics consulting among other things.

“Since 2013, the tech workforce in Nashville has grown by 34 percent and we’re expecting it to grow another 15 percent by 2023,” says Chamblee.

The growth in female employment is evident in monthly meet-ups of the group Nashville Women Programmers. On the second Monday of every month, dozens of women gather at the Nashville Technology Council to hear speakers on topics like coding and career transitions.

“We started this group 6 years ago and there was like 6 people at a coffee shop and I think tonight we had 100 RSVP and we have over 1,000 meet-up members,” says Lisa French, a Senior Front End Engineer for Stratasan.

The February event speaker was Kara Luton, a Software Engineer and Nashville native. Her speech was titled “From Tutus to Tech” and chronicled her transition from professional ballerina, to music publicist to engineer.

“You don’t have to have a computer science degree in order to be an engineer in tech,” says Luton. “I come from a totally different background -- ballet and PR -- but there are still things I use from those careers that I use as a developer now.”

Luton began learning from a free source, Code Academy online while she was attending Belmont University. She notes another free site FreeCodeCamp is a resource that also teaches coding at no cost.

“More tech companies are coming out here and having their HQs here which is going to call for even more tech people to fill those jobs,” says Luton.

Based on the new SmartAsset study, Nashville ranked low for not adequately filling the gender pay gap.

In terms of the pay gap, women in the tech industry in Nashville were paid about 83% of what their male counterparts made. This gap has widened over the past five years, nationally. In 2018, the national gender pay gap in the tech industry was 83.1%, meaning that women’s earnings relative to men’s decreased by about 3.8%.

It’s a gap Chamblee hopes will close as more companies relocate to Nashville.

“A lot of the companies are choosing Nashville because of the tech talent that is already here and when they come they are attracting new people to come to town and that’s just furthering the expansion of tech talent in our community,” says Chamblee.

At this time, women occupy only 26.9% of tech jobs in Nashville, which is a number the all-female programming group is trying to change.

“Even though you may be one of only a few women right now, you’re paving the way for women in the future to work in tech,” says Luton.

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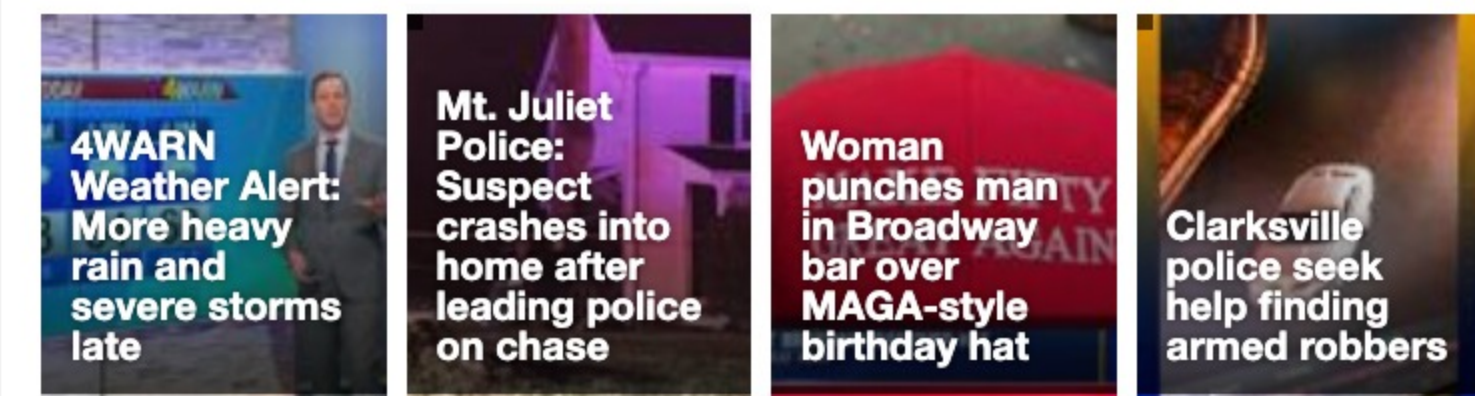
Lauren Lowrey joined News4 as an anchor in December 2018.



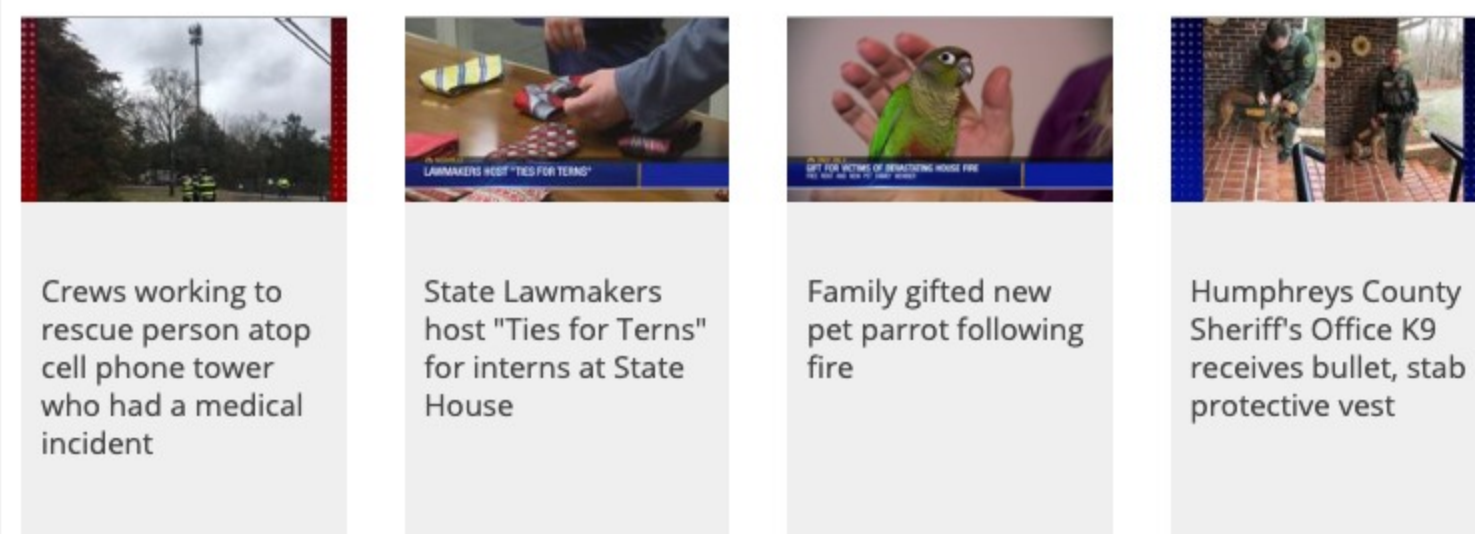
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