

Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois' robotics success a symbol of commitment to bringing STEM opportunities to girls

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GLEN CARBON – Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois robotics program has had great success so far this year. During recent FIRST LEGO League (FLL) tournaments for 9-14 year olds, four of ten competing teams won awards and one squad qualified for the state tournament. A team of older girls in the FIRST TECH Challenge (FTC) league

starts competition in January and has been busy giving demonstrations of their robot design and programming skills – including marching with their scene-stealing “candy cannon” in several holiday parades. GSSI is also gearing up to host a Jr FIRST LEGO League Expo (a science fair style robotics event for students age 6-9) for the southern Illinois region. GSSI’s “robot revolution” is indicative of the Girl Scout movement’s ongoing commitment to bringing girls relevant, exciting opportunities in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

This November and December, ten GSSI teams competed in FIRST LEGO League regional tournaments: Coding Catricorns and Coach Scott Gilbert, Carbondale; Fire Breathing Hexicorns and Coach Julie Herr, Belleville; Flower STEMs and Coach Megan Terrell of O'Fallon; GIR! and Coach Jason Dothager, Staunton; Knights of the Round LEGO and Coach Winnie Kenney, O'Fallon; Lightning Storm and Coach Sarah Klosterman, Belleville; Purple Robot Penguins and Coach Larry Buchanan, O'Fallon; Robots of the Round Table and Coach Celeste Borders, Anna; Super Weird Awesome Tinkerbots (SWAT) and Coach Krysti Connelly, Troy and Undercover Upcyclers and Coach Jill Thomas, Albers. Three additional teams hosted by GSSI participated in the FLL program, but elected not to compete. (Metro East teams were funded by The Monsanto Fund, the philanthropic arm of the Monsanto Company).

During regional competition, GIR! won a Core Values Award for best representing the FLL’s cornerstone values, SWAT won a Project Award for their superb research project and presentation, Knights of the Round LEGO won a Rookie Award for best first year team and Purple Robot Penguins won a Champion’s Award and Performance Award for top Robot Game Score; the team also qualified for the State Tournament on Jan. 23 at University of Illinois.



"Our FLL program is having an amazing year," said STEM Program Manager Mary Buchanan, who oversees GSSI's robotics program. She added in addition to the thrill of winning awards, she is also pleased to see the program is also growing geographically. "We've expanded into two new areas in the southern part of our jurisdiction - Anna and Carbondale. We would love to continue expanding the robotics program throughout the council because girls love the exciting, team-oriented STEM challenges it offers."

Buchanan also noted that GSSI's robotics program has gotten more men involved with Girl Scouts. "More than half of our robotics teams - including our FIRST TECH Challenge team for older girls - has had a father coaching," she said. "Seeing more dads participating and helping build girls' confidence and skills in STEM is great!"

Career opportunities related to STEM fields are expected to continue to grow and studies show they pay 33% more than non-STEM jobs. However, a recent survey by the Girl Scouts Research Institute found that while 74% of high school girls are interested in STEM, less than a quarter of jobs in that field are filled by women. Girl Scouts offers numerous program opportunities to encourage more girls to follow their interests to build for a successful future.

At GSSI, robotics is one of many STEM opportunities that girls have to explore. Other programs offered throughout the year include activities such as simple circuit wiring,

exploring forensics, digital movie making, learning more about wildlife and nature and even STEM and art. The council also offers two STEM day camps during the summer, this year's offerings being "STEM Explosions 4: The Hammer of Thor" for girls grades 4-12 on July 25-29 and "Mini STEM Explosions 3" for girls in grades K-3 on July 7-8.



"We're so grateful for all of the parents, volunteers and supporters who invest in our robotics program and other STEM activities," said Buchanan. "Studies show that girls actually do have a high interest in STEM activities, despite the stereotype. Providing them with role models, encouragement and interesting challenges helps develop this interest and opens their minds to future opportunities."

Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois is a high-capacity Girl Scout council serving nearly 14,000 girls and almost 5,000 adult volunteers in 40 ½ counties in southern Illinois. Girl Scouting has inspired more than 50 million girls and women since its founding in 1912. Today, Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. is the largest voluntary organization for girls in the world. Its sole focus is to meet the needs of all girls (ages 5-17) from diverse racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Today's Girl Scouts not only enjoy camping and crafts, but they also explore math and science and learn about diversity, good citizenship, leadership and teamwork. Girl Scouting is the place where girls experience the fun, friendship and power of girls together.

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The Girl Scout Mission: *Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place.*