

# Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois Awarded \$20,000 Grant from the Monsanto Fund

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Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois (GSSI) has received a \$20,000 grant from the Monsanto Fund to support Girl Scout robotics teams in Jersey, Macoupin, Madison, Monroe and St. Clair counties. Robotics are a key component of GSSI's commitment to giving girls opportunities and guidance in science, engineering, technology and math (STEM). By participating in three different robotics leagues at three different age levels, GSSI aims to engage more girls across southern Illinois in STEM, so that they can explore valuable career options, build critical thinking and technical skills and sustain a lifelong interest in topics that many girls drift away from by middle school.



“Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois is very grateful to be able to provide even more girls with the opportunity to compete on a robotics team through support from the Monsanto Fund,” said Mary Buchanan, GSSI Robotics Manager. “Engaging girls in STEM in fun, creative ways helps keep their interest in these valuable career fields, as well as develop their confidence, teamwork and problem solving abilities.”

Money from the grant will help fund GSSI’s robotics season which starts this fall with *FIRST*® LEGO® League (FLL®). In this global robotics program for 9 to 14 year olds, participants build and program a robot using LEGO components. Teams also conduct a research project and explore FLL Core Values such as active participation, teamwork and gracious professionalism. After months of practice and preparation, teams begin competing at regional tournaments, with the highest scoring teams proceeding to a global tournament.

“Women make up 50.8% of the U.S. population but only 25% of our STEM workforce,” said Monsanto Fund president Deborah Patterson. “Programs like this, which really encourage young ladies to explore and expand their interest in science, technology, engineering and math, could be key to narrowing that gender gap.”

Grant money will also be used to support several Junior *FIRST* Lego League (JrFLL®) teams and two Botball® teams, which belong to a league that challenges middle and high school students to build two autonomous robots then program them using C, C++ or Java. The robots perform a series of preprogrammed tasks in direct competition with another team at the same table. Botball teams will compete at regional tournaments in the spring, with top scoring teams advancing to global competition. In 2013, GSSI had the only all Girl Scout Botball teams in the world.

The grant will also allow GSSI to purchase additional equipment to facilitate the robotics program, including robot kits and tablets. Financial assistance for girls who cannot afford the \$15 registration fee to join Girl Scouts will also be provided.

GSSI’s STEM program continues to be a progressive and forward-thinking initiative that has grown exponentially in recent years. In 2009, GSSI had just one robotics team. In 2014, they will host 24 teams. GSSI has dedicated staff and volunteers who develop the STEM program through research, collaborator cultivation, training and hands-on experience. GSSI strives to offer diverse and high-quality STEM programming, such as simple circuit wiring, programming robots, exploring forensics and more. To ensure that all girls have the chance to take advantage of these future-

building opportunities, GSSI has integrated STEM activities into its outreach programs – which bring Girl Scouting to girls in underserved populations, such as low income neighborhoods, housing projects, rural communities and even detention centers.

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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## **About Monsanto Fund**

The Monsanto Fund, the philanthropic arm of the Monsanto Company, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening the communities where farmers and Monsanto Company employees live and work. Visit the Monsanto Fund at [www.monsantofund.org](http://www.monsantofund.org).

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

**Check us out at:** [www.gssofsi.org](http://www.gssofsi.org)