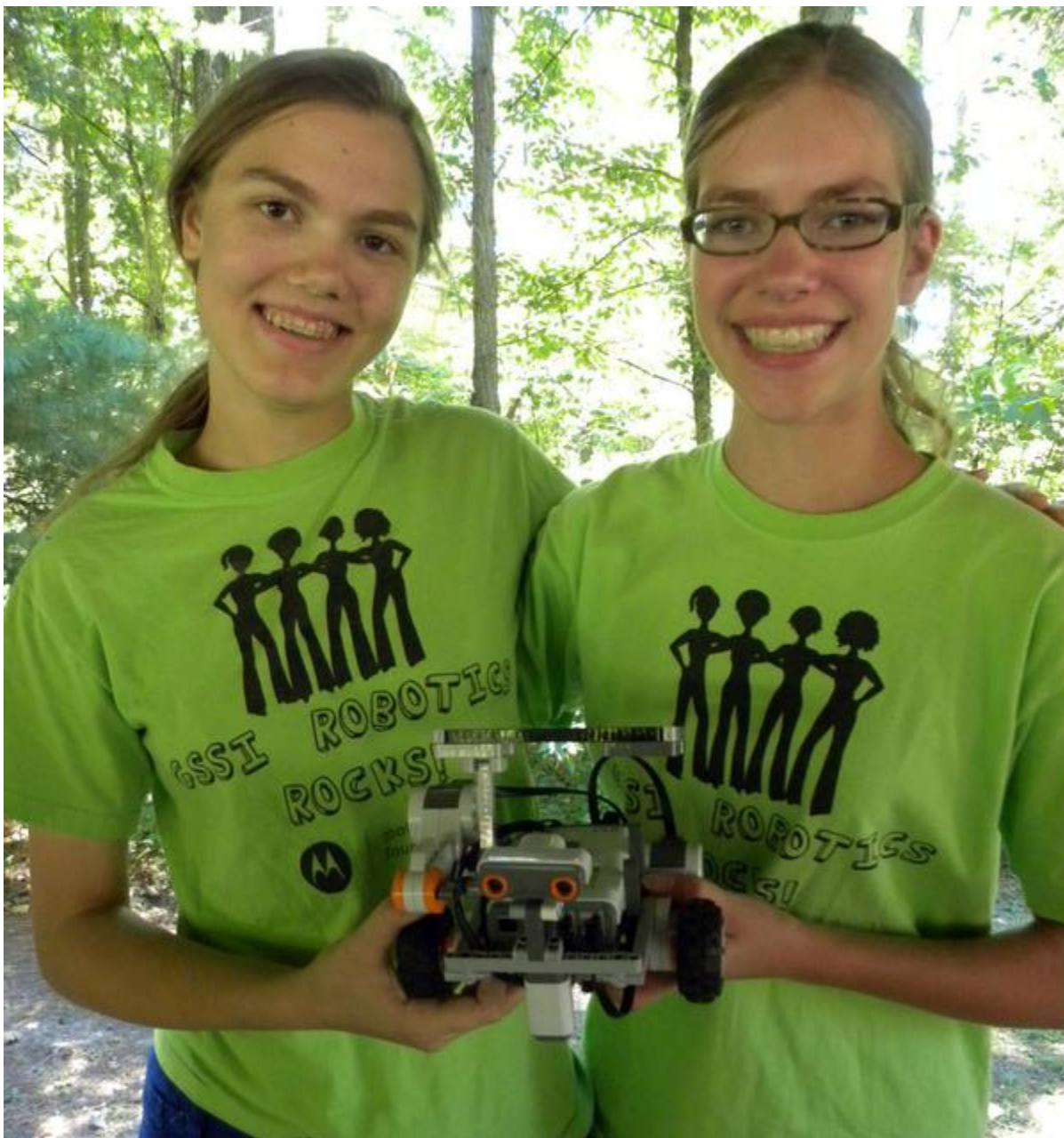


Girls Scouts form Southern Illinois host STEM kick off events for ROBOTICS

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Girl Scouts from throughout southern Illinois gathered at Camp Torqua in Edwardsville on Saturday to participate in Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois' STEM Kickoff event called *Nature's Fury*. During the morning, girls learned about natural disasters that affect the metro-east area and in the afternoon they learned computer programming with hands-on experience working with the Nature's Fury Robot Game.

In 2009, GSSI began its STEM and robotic journey with one robotic team. This year, GSSI is sponsoring 25 Girl Scout robotics teams in three different leagues. Robotics teams are a key component to GSSI's initiative to get more girls in southern Illinois interested and involved in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). Other STEM programming ranges from doing basic chemistry experiments with younger girls to teaching financial literacy during the Girl Scout Cookie Program to introducing older girls to career mentors in engineering and medicine.

"Engaging girls in STEM in exciting, relevant ways is vital," said GSSI STEM program manager Mary Buchanan. "Research shows that many students, especially girls, drift away from STEM around middle school. Today's kickoff is just one of the ways GSSI is providing diverse opportunities to build and reinforce girls' interest in these important fields. As shown by our growth in the number of robotics teams, many girls are searching for ways to stay involved in STEM and we strive to provide them with unique and constructive experiences."

"I like working with the Girl Scouts robots and technology and making solutions to problems," said Caroline Stewart from Belleville. "I get a leadership experience not only by programming the robots, but working with the younger girls and sharing with them my love of technology and robots," Caroline, who is 14, has been with GSSI's robotic program for 4 years.

GSSI's metro-east robotics teams are funded by the United Way of Greater St. Louis and through a \$20,000 grant from the Monsanto Fund. "Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois is very grateful to be able to provide even more girls with a STEM opportunity and a chance to compete on a robotics team through the financial support from the Monsanto Fund and the United Way," said Villie M. Appoo, GSSI Chief Executive Officer. "Working together, we are ensuring girls in southern Illinois are learning about STEM and robotics, gaining confidence in building and programming robotics and starting to think about a possible STEM career," Appoo added. "Thanks to our United Way and the Monsanto Fund partners, Girl Scouts is keeping girls engaged in STEM in fun and creative ways which will help keep them interested in these important career fields, as well as develop their confidence, teamwork and problem solving abilities."

"Women make up 50.8% of the U.S. population but only 25% of our STEM workforce," said the 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.”

Also, GSSI is proud that one of its robotic teams, the Robotic Gems from Washington Park, is being featured in United Way of Greater St. Louis’ 2013 fundraising campaign. The team of five 11-year old Girl Scouts from James Avant Elementary School was funded by United Way to compete in the FIRST Lego League (FLL) robotics program. FLL provides girls ages 9-14 with real-world engineering challenges by having them design, build, test and program Lego robots to compete themed tasks. During the FLL regional tournament at McKendree University, Robotic Gems won the Core Values award for exemplifying FLL cornerstones such as collaborative learning, teamwork, gracious professionalism and dedication to a goal.

Girl Scouts has a long history of encouraging girls to participate in STEM. The first STEM badges – the electrician badge and the flyer badge – were introduced in 1913!

Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois serves 14,000 girls and 4,800 adult volunteers in more than 40 counties in southern Illinois. Girl Scouting has inspired more than 50 million girls and women since its founding in 1912. Girl Scouting is focused on providing a premier Girl Scout Leadership Experience for girls in the 21st century, while ensuring the traditions and values that have been core to Girl Scouting since its beginning remain strong and relevant.

Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois is a not-for-profit organization supported by various United Ways throughout the region. Girl Scouts is a Proud Partner of United Way. For more information, please call Erin Johnson at 618.692.0692.

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