



# **Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois' Robotics Team From Washington Park Featured in 2013 United Way Campaign**

September 30 2013 10:39 AM



Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois' robotic team, the Robotic Gems of Washington Park, is being featured in United Way of Greater St. Louis' 2013 fundraising campaign. Last year, 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.

The girls on the Robotic Gems team are now attending various middle schools, but they plan to team up for another year together on Washington Park's GSSI robotics team. The girls are not only happy and excited about their experiences building and programming robots together, and being selected to represent Girl Scouts as part of the United Way campaign is very special to them. Not only are the girls featured in the annual United Way video, they are on posters and billboards around the St. Louis area as well.

"My friends are shocked that I could be on a billboard," said team member Diavion Butler. Teammate Akayla Henson added, "I haven't told anyone about being in the United Way video...I am waiting for people to see it and talk about it."

"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. GSSI provides diverse opportunities to build and reinforce interest in these valuable fields. As shown by our growth from one robotics team in 2009 to 25 in 2013, many girls are searching for ways to stay involved in STEM and we strive to provide them with unique and constructive experiences."

Akayla, who wants to major in law and has an interest in engineering said, "Robotics has changed my whole life. Now I know how to work as a team. I learned to be patient when working together to achieve something." She added that the robotics program has convinced her that she can help other people and change the world.

This year, GSSI has 25 Girl Scout robotics teams participating 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.

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.

#### About United Way of Greater St. Louis

*United Way funds more than 170 health and human service agencies located throughout a 16-county area in Missouri and Illinois. One in three people in our community receive services that strengthen families, help the elderly, keep children healthy and safe, and build stronger neighborhoods. For more information, contact 314-421-0700 or visit [www.stl.unitedway.org](http://www.stl.unitedway.org).*

[Watch United Way's campaign video featuring the Robotic Gems](#)