

Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois' Robotics Team from Roxana To Compete at State Tournament

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TBot 907 from Roxana, one of Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois' (GSSI) Robotics Teams, is gearing up for the FIRST Lego League (FLL) State Tournament this Saturday, Jan. 18, at University of Illinois.

FLL is a robotics program for 9 to 14 year olds which is designed to get children excited about science and technology, as well as teach them valuable life skills. Teams use a LEGO MINDSTORMS Lego set to build and program an autonomous robot to score points on a themed competition table. The theme for this year's tournament was "Nature's Fury" and concerned how science can help aid prevention and recovery efforts during natural disasters. Along with programming robots, teams are also evaluated on an elaborate research project, as well as how well they demonstrate FLL Core Values, which include teamwork, collective learning, active participation and gracious professionalism. After practicing and preparing for months, teams meet at regional qualifying tournaments to be graded on the three elements, with the top teams advancing to state competition.

While TBot 907 qualified to advance to state by a lottery after their regional tournament was cancelled due to weather, they showed they belong among the best when they earned the "Champion's Award" during a make-up exhibition tournament on Jan. 11 at Carriel Jr. High in O'Fallon. The award is given to the team with the best overall performance, which includes competition table score, research project, presentation skills and team values.

TBot 907 is coached by volunteer Tara Holbrook. Team members are Taylor Holbrook, Abigail Kurth, Hannah Oldendorph, Michaela Tarpley and Victoria Tarpley.

"The FLL Robotics Program has been amazing," said Holbrook. "The girls practice each day after school and the hardest thing has been to pack up and leave. They are discovering at a young age that learning is a lifelong process and there is always more to explore and accomplish." 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. This focus on STEM is nothing new for Girl Scouts – in fact, the first STEM badges – the electrician badge and the flyer badge – were introduced in 1913!

"Engaging girls in STEM in exciting, relevant ways is vital," explained 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 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."

TBot 907 is one of four GSSI Robotics Teams that will be competing in the State FLL Tournament. The others are The Lego Divas from Effingham, Lightning Storm from Belleville and GS4S from Ozark.

TBot 907 and Lightning Storm were funded through a \$20,000 grant from the Monsanto Fund in support of GSSI's metro-east area robotics teams. "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," 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.

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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