

MELHS Robotics Program Receives \$30,000 Grant

by Angela Mueller
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EDWARDSVILLE – Metro-East Lutheran High School has received a \$30,000 grant to support its growing robotics program.

The funds were awarded by an Oregon-based foundation that supports Christian educational opportunities and will allow MELHS to continue to grow its STEM programming.

The robotics team plans to use the grant money to purchase equipment such as updated computers and engineering lab stations, a new 3D printer, robot parts and other supplies. They also plan to update the school's robotics classroom with new furniture, including desks, chairs and storage units.

This is just the second year the MELHS robotics team has been competing as part of the Southern Illinois division for the FIRST Tech Challenge. Last year the team won two rookie awards, including highest-scoring rookie.

"We started our rookie year with nothing," said Dan Staake, one of the team's coaches. "I told the students last year that all the other teams started the year with a robot that was programmed and we started with a box of parts, and we still scored well above average in the final."

The MELHS robotics program previously has received funding through grants or other support from Boeing, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and the state of Illinois. But this latest grant will take the program to the next level, according to the team's coaches.

"This program brings in STEM opportunities, engineering opportunities, applied mathematics opportunities for our students," said Tim Lorenz, math and technology teacher at MELHS and a robotics team coach. "It gets them thinking about those fields outside the classroom in a more hands-on way."

Staake said students in the robotics program are learning a wide spectrum of engineering skills.

"We are programming with programming languages you would use out in the industry," he said.

But it's not all just programming and engineering. The students also have to learn business skills, such as marketing to help land sponsorships for the team and managing the team's finances.

"It's not just about raw science," Lorenz said. "It's also about the collaboration between students in a project atmosphere and understanding the ebb and flow of working together on a project."

Staake said he tells the students it's just like running a company.

"We represent a company that has a product, and our product happens to be a robot that goes to competitions," he said.

Metro-East Lutheran High School (MELHS) has been providing academic excellence in a Christ-centered environment for more than 40 years. **For more information about Metro-East Lutheran High School** go to www.melhs.org.

