

Robotics workshop at Wood River Public Library inspires young engineers

by Madelaine Gerard, Staff Writer
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WOOD RIVER - The University of Illinois Extension in Madison County, in conjunction with the County's 4-H organization, held a robotics workshop at 4 p.m. on Thursday, July 30, at the **Wood River Public Library**.

The workshop, led by the program's own Katie Backs, allowed children entering third grade and above to discover the wonders of simple robotics. Backs introduced the dozen or so children in attendance the basics of electronic circuits. She also stressed the importance of safety while handling electronic equipment; especially the use of protective eyewear.



In the first activity of the workshop, Backs taught the group of kids some fundamental vocabulary involved with basic circuits. She encouraged the audience of children to raise their hand to answer questions, which was met with unsurmountable success. To put the new knowledge to the test, Backs had the participants attempt to light a Christmas light using only one AA battery. The participants were mesmerized when they realized how the battery's charge could light a small light by only touching its poles.





In the next activity, Backs had the students sketch out designs for potential robots using only simple household items, such as rubber bands, masking tape, a plastic cup, an eraser, and a felt tip marker. After some sketches were discussed, Backs demonstrated the actual robot, a spinning “can can” design that spun around in a circle, creating a design on the paper-covered tables.



The children worked diligently to mimic Backs' design, some choosing to make their own ideas come to life. Finally, one young girl successfully created a working robot and demonstrated it to the class.



After a summer of fun, this activity seemed to be enough to get the children interested in technology other than their iPads and other electronics. Backs' presentation explained that not only are science and engineering fields important, they can also be really fun.

