

MISSOURI AFTERSCHOOL DIRECTOR SHERRY COMER

HONORED AS AN AFTERSCHOOL CHAMPION IN NATION'S CAPITAL

The Afterschool Alliance honored Sherry Comer, Afterschool Services Director for the Camdenton R-III Schools in Camdenton, Missouri, for her support for afterschool programs at the “Breakfast of Champions,” a gala event in Washington, D.C., featuring *FIRST* Robotics founder Dean Kamen. Comer has been a leader for afterschool in Missouri and worked tirelessly to educate policy makers about the important role that afterschool programs play in educating children about science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

Comer was one of just nine state champions from around the country honored at the Breakfast for supporting and working on behalf of afterschool programs. The Missouri AfterSchool Network nominated her for the honor. Comer served as the Chair of the Missouri AfterSchool Network for three years, while also acting as an Afterschool Alliance

Afterschool Ambassador, increasing support for afterschool programs in Missouri among the public and policy makers. As the Afterschool Services Director for Camdenton R-III Schools, she strongly supports and oversees the school district’s *FIRST* Robotics team, LASER 3284, and has accompanied many students to the state capitol to talk to policy makers about how important afterschool programs are in improving STEM education. ***“Sherry understands how important afterschool programs are, not only to children and families, but***

to our communities and our society as a whole,” said Teresa Foulkes, Director of the Missouri AfterSchool Network. ***“She also recognizes that these programs can play a unique role in getting our youth excited about and engaged in the sciences and math, and has helped champion the FIRST Robotics program in the Camdenton school district as an excellent vehicle for helping educate a generation that can excel in these fields.”***

The **“Breakfast of Champions”** is part of the tenth annual Afterschool for All Challenge, sponsored by the Afterschool Alliance, which brings together hundreds of parents, educators, children, program directors and advocates from around the country for a series of events and meetings with members of Congress. Following the Breakfast, participants fanned out across Capitol Hill to meet with members of Congress and talk to them about the importance of afterschool programs and expanding opportunities for kids to engage in STEM activities in those programs.

This year is The Year of Science in Afterschool. ***“Afterschool programs are a lifeline for working families, they keep kids safe and - most important - inspire them to learn. These programs are uniquely positioned to provide hands-on and real-world STEM learning opportunities,”*** said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. ***“It’s no secret that our nation has some serious catching-up to do when it comes to math and the sciences. We know that afterschool programs are successful in getting children excited about science. By offering children the opportunity to try robotics, CSI, rocket-building, or constructing wind turbines, afterschool programs are developing future computer programmers, forensic scientists, and engineers.”***

Accompanying Mrs. Comer on her trip were two members of the LASER robotics team, sophomore Kyle Gulshen and senior Sierra Comer. Gulshen represented the youth of our country and received a standing ovation after delivering his speech about what the afterschool program had given him through his participation in *FIRST* robotics. Sierra Comer helped to lead youth advocacy group meetings and greeted Senators and other award winners. Both students were selected to present awards to senators and other influential leaders from our nation. Gulshen and Comer were selected to attend the event by *FIRST* mentors and the NOYCE foundation.



FIRST Founder and famous inventor Dean Kamen, Kyle Gulshen, Sierra Comer and Sherry Comer.

Also honored at the event was inventor Dean Kamen, the founder of *FIRST* robotics. Both Kyle and Sierra were seated with Mr. Kamen and got to visit with him about the impact that *FIRST* has had on their education and future career plans. After the “Breakfast of Champions”, the students and Mrs. Comer visited Capitol Hill where they meet with Senator Blunt and numerous State Representatives to promote afterschool programs.

Mrs. Comer stated, ***“I am honored to represent all of the hard work that numerous Camdenton R-III staff members have put into our afterschool program. Over 70 teachers and support staff work in the Camdenton afterschool program. Our team works hard to link project-based activities to district curriculum and state standards while inspiring learning and increasing academic achievement. This award is because of their hard work and many other individuals in Missouri who work tirelessly to provide quality afterschool programs for the youth of our state.”***



Laker Afterschool Science Engineering and Robotics

The Camdenton High School 4-H LASER (Laker Afterschool Science Engineering & Robotics) team built upon last year's rookie Cinderella season and found even more success and accolades this year. The high school 4-H LASER team experienced huge growth, increasing the membership by 150% and doubling the number of adult mentors working with the team. The 4-H LASER family grew even more as the afterschool program added robotics teams at the Middle School and Oak Ridge Intermediate this school year. Additional programs are being planned at Osage Beach and Hurricane Deck Elementary schools for next year.

An important aspect of being on the High School LASER team is the requirement to mentor younger students and teach them about "Gracious Professionalism" and "Cooperation". These are concepts that teach students how important it is to help your fellow teammates and even members of other teams.

This year's 4-H LASER team competed in two of the 49 *FIRST* (For Inspiration in Robotics, Science, and Technology) regional competitions held around the world. *FIRST*, founded by Dean Kamen, was started 20 years ago to encourage students to embrace education in the STEM areas and to challenge themselves with a more rigorous course selection in school. *FIRST* robotics now serves more than 250,000 students from 61 countries.



Dennis Harmon from AT&T mentors members of the drive team, Connor Brady and Kyle Gulshen

The Greater Kansas City regional competition was held March 10 -12 at Hale Arena. Competing with 56 other teams from the Midwest, the 4-H LASER team finished second with alliance teams from Barstow and Blue Springs. This provided experience for the team as they traveled to St. Louis the following week. There, the team made an impressive showing by winning the event with alliance members from Hazelwood Central and University City high schools. The team was also recognized for receiving the "Quality Award", sponsored by Motorola, and the "Industrial Safety Award", sponsored by Underwriters Laboratory.

The team won the regional competition in St. Louis, qualifying them to attend the World Championship that took place this year in St. Louis. The 4-H LASER team represented the Camdenton R-III School District with pride and perseverance in true Laker fashion. While at the world finals,

the team met teams from many countries around the world, visited Scholarship Row and met with professors and students from various colleges, including MIT, Purdue, Missouri Science and Technology, and University of Missouri Engineering. Students were also able to visit booths and speak to

members of NASA, the CIA, Boeing and numerous other agencies and businesses. The United States Air Force had working robots on display, as did the CIA and many other Federal agencies.

At the World Championship, seniors Stephanie Cahail and Sierra Comer were awarded *FIRST* scholarships to the University of Missouri and University of Missouri Science and Technology, respectively, where they will attend in the fall of 2011.



This summer, high school team members will start work for next season. If you have technical skills or an engineering background and would like more information on becoming a mentor, contact Sherry Comer, Afterschool Services Director, at 346-9233. More information about the robotics team can be found at the District website, www.camdentonschools.org (Afterschool Services).

The team is sponsored by Camdenton R-III Afterschool Services through the 21st CCLC afterschool grant, 4-H, Speedline Technologies, Lake Professional Engineering, AT&T and the Camdenton Optimist Club.



Brandon Kapp, Mitch Woodside, Blake Barbour and Stephanie McQueen celebrate winning the St. Louis Regional Championship.