

Camdenton Students Take Their Robot Skills to Australia

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Camdenton LASER Robotics Team



photo by Sherry Comer

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by Janet Dabbs

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Team members included middle school students Josh Harmon, Rachel Harris, Taylor McGowan, Raymond Kline, Riley Head, Melissa Stout and high school student mentor Keaton Meyer. Traveling with the students were Head Coach Jane Morris, Assistant Coach Christine Head, After -School Director Sherry Comer, High School First Robotics Challenge Coach Mitch Comer, and Team Mentor Adam Morris.

FIRST® Tech Challenge

According to the organization's website, "FTC is designed for students in grades 7-12 to compete head to head, using a sports model. Teams are responsible for designing, building, and programming their robots to compete in an alliance format against other teams. The robot kit is reusable from year-to-year and is programmed using a variety of languages. Teams, including coaches, mentors and volunteers, are required to develop strategy and build robots based on sound engineering principles. Awards are given for the competition as well as for community outreach, design, and other real-world accomplishments."

The students:

- Designed, built, and programmed robots

- Applied real-world maths and science concepts

- Developed problem-solving, organizational, and team-building skills

- Competed and cooperated in alliances and tournaments

- Competed for a spot in the World Championship

- Qualified for over \$13.5 million in international university scholarships

The Camdenton 4-H LASER LASER 5908 team was on the Winning Alliance after being selected to join the number one alliance, Cougar Robotics, from Columbus, Ohio, and the second place alliance Wingus and Dingus, from New Zealand.

The LASER team also received the Motivate Award. The FTC site explains, "This judged award celebrates the team that exemplifies the essence of the FIRST Tech Challenge competition through teambuilding, team spirit, and exhibited enthusiasm. This team embraces the culture of FIRST and clearly

demonstrates what it means to be a team. This is a team who makes a collective effort to make FIRST known throughout their school and community, and sparks others to embrace the culture of FIRST."

"The kids did an amazing job communicating and working together with the other teams," Head Coach Jane Morris commended. "They were prepared and ready." Team members said they enjoyed the challenge of finding alternative ways to communicate with teams that spoke diverse languages.

FIRST®

FIRST® was founded by inventor Dean Kamen to inspire an appreciation of science and technology in young people. The not-for-profit organization designs accessible, innovative programs to build self-confidence, knowledge and life skills, while motivating young people to pursue opportunities in science, technology, engineering and math, STEM.

"The FIRST® program has given our students opportunity to learn about STEM in a very real way so that they can grasp it, and run with it," Head Coach Jane Morris said. "This can literally take them all over the world! Many of our Camdenton students have decided to go on to choose engineering, or some other STEM related field, as their college major." Graduating alumni have in fact gone on to attend prestigious technological universities including Stanford University, California Institute of Technology and Missouri Science and Technology, Rolla.

The robotics program has been in existence in Camdenton for six years when it was developed by the Camdenton Afterschool program to fill the need to address the academic needs of higher level STEM learning in a stimulating, hands-on manner. FIRST® was implemented at the high school level as a way to get students excited about STEM.

As a result of the high school programs success, elementary programs were added, and then the FTC program was added to bridge the gap between Jr. First Lego® League, FLL programs at the elementary level, and the rigor of the high school First Robotics Competition, FRC, program.

"The FIRST® LASER robotics program currently serves one in every 14 students out of the District's total student body of 4,200," said Sherry Comer, Camdenton Afterschool Services Director. Starting with 21 students, the program has exploded and surpassed all goals for growth.

It has become a national STEM model for 4-H, capturing numerous awards at all levels including four high school FRC Regional Championships and World Champion Finalists and numerous other awards at all four levels of the program.

The Camdenton FIRST® LASER Robotics Program has most recently received funding from a Community Foundation of the Lake pass-through donation from the DEMDACO Company on behalf of Country Crossroads, the Camdenton R-III School District Education Foundation and local businesses, organizations and individuals. Team members raise their own travel funds by giving presentations.

During the successful Sydney competition, the Camdenton team was in high spirits teaching and leading the other teams in the “LASER shuffle” dance. “Everybody joined in and had a blast!” Coach Morris added.

After the competition, the team toured Sydney by hiking to a waterfall in the Blue Mountains, visiting the Sydney Eye Tower, the Opera House, and Darling Harbor as well as meeting Aborigines. “Our most memorable moment was the day we were supposed to go to the mountains and it snowed eight inches,” Coach Morris laughed. Instead, they went swimming in a freezing cold ocean. The program was not only educational, but also rich in life experiences as it was the first time that four students set their eyes on an ocean, and the first time three team members traveled by airplane. The students also got up close to koalas and kangaroos.



2015 Rolla qualifier Motivate Award

2015 Asian Pacific International Invitational Motivate Award

2015 Asian Pacific International Invitational Winning Alliance

2014 Camdenton FTC Qualifier Rockwell Collins Innovate Award

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