

Award-winning program bigger than just 'Robotics'

Photos



Deanna Wheeler/Lake Sun

Kids involved in the Camdenton LASER program run a demonstration on some of the projects they've been working on.

By Deanna Wheeler

lakenewsonline.com

Camdenton, Mo. —

There's a small transition occurring at the Camdenton School District. It's small, but noticeable in some cliques at the high school. Being smart is becoming cool again.

Junior Kaitlyn Goodwin is noticing it, actually, she's right in the middle of helping bring on the change. Goodwin is one of 250 kids in the district involved in an after-school robotics program designed to unlock students' potential in problem solving, research; even skills in marketing, presentation and building partnerships are put to the test.

On the surface, the goal of Camdenton's LASER team is to build a working robot that accomplishes tasks. As Goodwin explains, the real purpose goes much deeper.

"The stigma of what is cool is changing," Goodwin said. "This is becoming the 'new cool'. Kids are really

excited when there's a competition and they get really pumped up."

Lessons extend beyond building a robot. Students learn teamwork and problem-solving. There are clashes, Goodwin said, but the students learn to work through them on their own, just as they would in the workplace.

A self-labeled nerd with a love of music, Goodwin would have never considered a career in engineering, computers or software programming until she got involved with the after-school program.

Her dream college is now MIT.

Project Pass Coordinator Sherry Comer said lagging interest in engineering, computer and other careers in the United States is what made the bringing the 4H LASER Robotics program to Camdenton especially important.

The popularity of the program was completely unexpected.

In the first year, technology instructor Mitch Comer hand-selected 21 students to participate, nearly begging other teachers to help assist. The second year, 250 students across the district are involved at all levels of the nationally-accredited program.

Comer and other advisors had to turn away students who wanted to be involved.

"We were limited by mentors, space and resources," Comer said.

Several businesses have been involved since the beginning including Lake Professional Engineering.

Owner Jim Jackson said it was interesting when he started volunteering because some kids had never even held a screwdriver but they were supposed to build a robot.

"They were so proud when, in the end, they looked at something they built and it worked," Jackson said.

"It's not about what they built, though, it's about building the child."

About FRC

- Designed for students in grades 9-12 (ages 14-18).
- Teams of 25 students or more.
- Has extremely strict rules, limited resources and time limits.
- Challenges students to raise funds, design a team "brand", hone teamwork skills and build and program robots to perform prescribed tasks against competitors.

About FLL

- Designed for students in grades 4-8 (ages 9-14).
- Strategize, design, build, program, and test a robot using LEGO MINDSTORMS® technology.
- Apply real-world math and science concepts.
- Develop employment and life skills including critical thinking, time management, collaboration, and communication while becoming more self confident.

About Camdenton 4-H LASER Team 3284

Advisors: Mitch Comer and Jane Noyes

Website: more information is available on www.camdentonschools.org