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Camdenton hosts *FIRST*® robotics competition

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Spree Hilliard
Lake Sun Reporter

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Spree Hilliard/Lake Sun Members of a Camdenton team prepare their creations during the first ever Mid Missouri *FIRST*® LEGO® League (FLL) Qualifier held at Camdenton High School Saturday.

Camdenton

One hundred and forty volunteers, 24 teams and more than 10,000 LEGOs later and you have the first ever Mid Missouri FIRST® LEGO® League (FLL) Qualifier. This year, Camdenton FLL teams took a step back and hosted the event. Teams from all over the state including Benton, Eldon, St. Louis, Waynesville and Camdenton home teams all competed.

For the Eldon students, the Mid Missouri Qualifier was their first real taste of FLL.

"It's been really fun," Eldon fifth grade student P.J. Bledsoe said. "We've met other teams and learned a lot of stuff."

Eldon spent last year learning from Camdenton teams, shadowing them and even going to the World Championship in St. Louis to see what FLL is all about. This year, they began the journey for themselves. For months, they have researched, practiced and learned with one another. All of their hard work led up to this past weekend.

Since the students had never participated in an FLL competition, some came to the qualifier with some reservations.

"I felt kind of nervous," sixth grade student Tyler Jones said of first arriving to the competition. "Now that we are here, it's really fun."

Approximately 23,000 youth participate in FLL from 63 countries around the world. Students involved in FLL are taught that life and even this competition is about more than winning, it's about treating others with gracious professionalism and even helping competitors if needed.

"It's not about what you win. It's more about what you learn and discover," fifth grade student Morgan Giorgione from Eldon said.

Eldon students were not the only ones who experienced firsts over the weekend. Camdenton High School and Middle School students took a step back from the competition and hosted the event instead.

"It's really exciting," Camdenton freshman Kylie Becker said. "You see people at the other tournaments hosting and you say, 'I want to do that.'"

Becker got her chance along with the rest of the middle school and high school team members.

Seventh grade student Josh Harmon said that being a part of hosting makes him proud of the LASER teams. For Harmon, the purpose of FLL is to show the community what the organization is all about and how important STEM is in today's society and hosting allows the team to do just that.

"I was so proud of our volunteers and the HS FRC 3284 and MS FTC teams for helping run this massive event. The community really helped to make this event a success," Sherry Comer Camdenton School District said.

Four teams will advance to the Championship tournament in St. Louis. The Clockworks from Kirksville, a Camdenton team, The Jedi guys from Troy and the LEAPing LEGOs from Waynesville all advanced.