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FIRST LEGO League Regional Qualifier in Camdenton doubles in size

33 teams compete in STEM-based tournament Saturday in Camdenton

The Camdenton 4-H Laser 568 team competes in one robot round, attempting to traverse their robot on its "Trash Trek" mission during the FIRST LEGO League Regional Qualifier Saturday in Camdenton.

The Camdenton 4-H Laser 568 team competes in one robot round, attempting to traverse their robot on its “Trash Trek” mission during the FIRST LEGO League Regional Qualifier Saturday in Camdenton. Photo by Samantha Edmondson.

By Samantha Edmondson

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Robotics students are “not talking trash – they are cleaning it up.”

As part of the 2015 FIRST Lego League Trash Trek Challenge, more than 233,000 children ages 9 to 16 from more than 80 countries are exploring the fascinating world of trash. These students have come up with ways to collect, sort, smart produce and reuse trash through presentations and skits, research and engineering and maneuvering robots on their on “Trash Trek,” testing those robots in a thought-provoking obstacle.

Hundreds of teachers, peers and members of the community watched and cheered as 33 Missouri teams competed in the third annual Mid-Missouri FIRST LEGO League Robotics Qualifier tournament Nov. 14 at Camdenton High School.



Photo by Samantha Edmondson

Drew Woodard, left, and Grace Steinmeyer of the Nixa Big Bot Theoray Atomic Warriors showcase their award-winning presentation and research conducted on recycling of nuclear waste at the FIRST LEGO League Regional Qualifier Saturday in Camdenton.

Hosted by the Camdenton 4-H FIRST LASER 3284, the all-day event involved students participating in an intense STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) challenge, “Trash Trek.” The 33 teams, which were made up of fourth through eighth grade students, were scored on different areas of competitions: presentation, robot design, core values and actual robot competitions rounds.

Five teams from the competitions earned top awards and will move onto the FIRST LEGO League Eastern Division State Championship Dec. 6 in St. Louis. With mechanical design work, innovation, programming effectiveness and team strategies for solving missions having the robot’s overall design quality stand out, judges award the Robot Design Award to the Eldon Upper Elementary Team 2 #8481. The Project Award, which is given to teams whose quality research, innovative solutions, community sharing and presentation best reflect an in-depth understanding of the scientific disciplines involved, went to the Laquey Buzz Bots Team #19453.

The Robot Performance Award was given to the Rolla Team #19321 Dust Bunnies. The R-Cuber Rolla Team #7149 were awarded the Core Values Award, which is given to the team that best demonstrates extraordinary enthusiasm and spirit, inspiration, exceptional partnership and upmost respect to its own teammates and support and encouragement of fellow teams. The Champions Award, which recognizes a team that embodies the FIRST LEGO League experience by fully embracing the program’s core values, was given to the Cam-Tronix St. Louis Team #4751.

Within the arena-style environment in the high school gymnasium, the 33 teams maneuvered their robots through a series of missions in a LEGO community faced with a “Trash Trek” during the tabletop competitions. Each team was able to compete in three, timed robot contests with its best overall score was used to help determine the top robot performance.

Even though all the teams followed the FIRST LEGO League guidelines for building their robots, many of the teams designed their robots with original parts to aid in multiple missions during this portion of the competition.

Additional robot awards were given to the 21550 Eldon Upper Elementary 4 team for Exceptional Mechanic Design, 565 Camdenton 4-H LASER Oak Ridge Intermediate team for the Programming Award, and the Springfield Robo Squad # 15912 team for Strategy and Innovation.

The teams also made a presentation, which was judged, that provided an innovative solution to help solve a trash problem within their chosen community or the world.

For example, two Camdenon FIRST LEGO League LASER teams made of fifth and sixth grade students and coached by Cathy Becker researched recycling and repurposing used car parts. One team member, sixth-grader Zachary Hunter explained how in the team's research they learned that car parts are recycled for a variety of purposes including artwork, garden beds and furniture.

Another team, the Nixa Big Bot Theory Atomic Warriors 1289, made up of sixth and seventh grade students, also researched how nuclear waste could be, in time, harvested to utilize in certain forms of medicine. Their extensive research outlined how nuclear waste sites are created, the lapse of time where they could be used and how they could be reutilized in the medicinal field. "It is a lot of trial and error, looking at ways to make this work," said team member and sixth-grade student Grace Steinmeyer.

"We did a lot of research ... this is something that is being used and can be used in real life," Steinmeyer said.

The Atomic Warriors team won both the Innovative Solutions award, which identifies a team's solution that is exceptionally well-considered and creative with good potential to solve the problem researched, and the Global Innovation Award nomination. According to Sherry Comer, Camdenon's afterschool services director, The FIRST LEGO League Global Innovation Award is presented by XPRIZE, and it rewards teams for their problem-solving, creativity, and inventiveness with an opportunity to further pursue their Project Solutions. Each FLL region puts forth a team for this award whose solution exemplifies innovation. In the St. Louis region, a team from each qualifier will compete to represent the region in the Global Innovation Award competition, including the opportunity to attend the semi-finals in Washington D.C. in June 2016 and to receive \$20,000 to further their innovative solution.

Other presentations centered a variety of ways to utilize trash, including repurposing of materials, such as the milk jugs into birdfeeders presented by the Eldon Gearheads Flaming Fists fourth and fifth grade team. A fellow Eldon team, the Eldon Upper Elementary 2 Nuclear Nerds 8481, secured the Presentation award at the tournament.

Additional awards given during the 2015 tournament included the Inspiration Award to Triple R's Camdenon 4-H LASER Oakridge Intermediate 562 team; the Teamwork Award to The Matrix

Camdenton 4-H LASER Oak Ridge Intermediate 566 team; the Gracious Professionalism Award to the Octobots Camdenton 4-H LASER Oak Ridge Intermediate 564 team; the Research Award to the LEAPing LEGOS Waynesville 517 team; the Perseverance Award to The Paperatzzi Camdenton 4-H LASER Hawthorn Elementary 560 team; and the Rising Star Award to the Nixa Big Bot Theory Iron Eagles 1290 team.



Photo by Samantha Edmondson

Members of the Eldon Flaming Fists showcase their repurposed milk jug birdfeeders they created as part of their “Trash Trek” presentation and research project at the event. They are, from left, Noah Myers, Marina Howard, Jared Noonan, Marissa Wazir and Zackary Brown.

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With the tournament open to the public, the Mid-Missouri FIRST LEGO League Qualifier saw many members of the Lake Area community in attendance to watch the competition, cheer on its participants, and explore STEM technology with special guests such as Kinetic Kathy from the Mad Science afterschool program, robotic demonstrations by the 4-H FIRST LASER Camdenton 3284 team and robotic showcases from the Camdenton Osage Beach Elementary, Hurricane Deck Elementary and Dogwood Elementary junior league teams.

Comer said more than a 100 volunteers assisted with the event, and many tournament sponsors helped with specials on hotels, food and activities, including the Camdenton Chamber of Commerce, Panera Bread Company and Andy’s Frozen Custard, Big Surf Water Park, Central Bank and Old Kinderhook.

“Team members received ice cream from Andy’s and a Big Surf pass to return to the Lake Area next summer,” Comer said. “We try to provide what teams need to have an amazing FIRST experience. The event has doubled in size and has quickly become a popular qualifying tournament because of our community.”

For more information about FIRST, visit www.usfirst.org.