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The force is strong with the 'Jedi Guys'

FIRST LEGO League team from Troy, Mo. wins champion award at first-ever regional qualifier tourney Saturday in Camdenton



The Jedi Guys FIRST LEGO League team from Troy, Mo. gives high-fives to the Mid-Missouri FLL Regional Qualifier Tournament referees, judges and others as they accept their championship award Saturday at the close of the event. The Jedi Guys are from left Grant

Allsberry, Gavin Stewart and Kent Allsberry; they will compete in the state championships Dec. 8 in St. Louis. Photo by [Samantha Edmondson](#).

By [Samantha Edmondson](#)

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When “Nature’s Fury” threw a small community into dire straits during a natural disaster Saturday, elementary and middle school students from across the state were there to help rescue its inhabitants and restore its infrastructure.

However, students did not do all the heavy lifting themselves. They built original robots to carry out needed duties, such as helping cargo planes reach safety, rescuing dogs and residents from homes, and clearing debris and pathways.

Hundreds of teachers, peers and members of the community watched and cheered as 24 teams competed in the first-ever Mid-Missouri *FIRST* LEGO League (FLL) Robotics Qualifier tournament Saturday at Camdenton High School.

Hosted by the Camdenton 4-H *FIRST* LASER 3284 and World Championship Galileo finalist, the all-day event involved students participating in an intense STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) challenge, “Nature’s Fury.”

A three-student team of “Jedi Guys” from Troy, Mo. who were just wanting to compete in the regional qualifier for fun, walked away with the Robot Award for Performance for highest score during the robot competition, and deemed champions of Saturday’s event. The Jedi Guys will advance along with two other teams from the regional qualifier to the Missouri State *FIRST* LEGO League Championships Dec. 8 in St. Louis.

The other teams who will advance to the championships are the LEAPing LEGOS from the Waynesville Sixth Grade Center, who won the Robot Award for Design, the Kirksville Clockworks, who won the Professionalism Award, and Camdenton Oak Ridge Intermediate FLL team 571, who won the Project Award for Innovative Solution.

The teams, which were made up of fourth- through eighth-grade students, participated in three different types of competition. Within the arena-style environment in the high school gymnasium, the 24 teams maneuvered their robots through a series of missions in a LEGO community faced with natural disaster 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 such as the nine-student LCMS (Lewis and Clark Middle School) Brain Power team from Jefferson City, who won the Robot Award for Programming.

“For one of our robots, we added a unique arm that will allow us to do different missions,” said Regan Resz, LCMS Brain Power team member and seventh-grade student.

Additional robot awards were given to the St. Louis Wizards’ Robotic Rhinos FLL team for Exceptional Mechanic Design and Ladue School District’s LEGO My Chocolate for Strategy and Innovation.

The teams also made a presentation, which was judged, that provided an innovative solution to help solve a natural disaster problem within their chosen community. Teams could select from a variety of natural disasters including tornadoes, fires, tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes and floods. The Eldon Middle School Gearheads team, which was one of three from the school district and its elementary teams starting this year, presented the “Thinkler.” This innovative solution to a fire involved a sprinkler assembled along a fence line that could detect a temperature increase of 250 degrees Fahrenheit or above near a residence. The “Thinkler” would activate a mobile app to alert homeowners and rescue units, as well as begin to extinguish a fire before firefighters arrived. The EMS Gearheads won the Project Award for Research for the “Thinkler.”

The LEAPing LEGOs, presented a natural disaster solution project that hit close to home. During the August flooding in the Waynesville area, rescue units found their boats building up with debris and causing additional havoc and safety issues while trying to assist with the natural disaster. This team, which consists of 10 students, designed the “Ultra Safety Boat,” or USB, that has aluminum tanks added to its structure. The USB clears debris from its paths and from damaging or weighing down the rescue boat, allowing the rescuers to move through floodwaters easily and safely.

Students also underwent a core evaluation, in which they completed an unknown activity in front of judges. These scores, as well as their project, presentation and robot competition scores, were calculated to help determine top award recipients. Three Camdenton FLL teams won additional awards during the regional qualifier. Camdenton Oak Ridge Intermediate FLL team 575 won the Presentation Award, Camdenton Oak Ridge Intermediate FLL 572 won the Inspiration Award and Camdenton Hawthorn Elementary FLL 578 won the Teamwork Award.

The Camdenton R-3 School District, which has *FIRST* program teams at elementary through high school levels, has shown gracious professionalism, competing in approximately 60 presentations over the last four years at the local, state and national levels, according to Sherry Comer, Camdenton’s afterschool services director.

“We are thrilled to be hosting this first annual regional qualifier, which is the first time it is held outside a larger area such as Kansas City or St. Louis,” she said before Saturday.

Comer said the local community has been amazing with huge supporters including the Camdenton Chamber of Commerce securing affordable hotel rates for teams, local businesses

giving attraction tickets to each student or providing refreshments for participants and judges, and others donating their time to help put on this tournament at the Camdenton High School.

“We have at most 10 students on each team, with parents, teachers and supporters visiting our community for this tournament. The community has been wonderful, even offering ways for these families and students to come back for another Lake visit in the future,” she said. “This tournament creates a big drive to our local economy with the amount of participants traveling to our area. We hope to grow this tournament next year to include 40 teams.”

Comer said they were able to utilize *FIRST* Lego League resources to bring in esteemed judges from out of town, as well, including a “mad scientist” from Kansas City, students from Missouri University of Science and Technology, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education representatives from Jefferson City, among other engineers and knowledgeable STEM-based professionals.

“Plus, we have 134 volunteers both from our local community and from out of the area,” she added.

With the first-ever 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 and robotic demonstrations by the 4-H *FIRST* LASER Camdenton 3284 team.

For the participants, the event was one of learning, excitement and fun. It was also a time for first-time *FIRST* LEGO League teams to gain competition experience and build on their growing interest in STEM education and future career pursuits.

The LCMS Brain Power team reformed this year after a 10-year hiatus from the *FIRST* program. However, its important roots at the school have seen results in innovating young students to pursue STEM careers. Kim Hatfield encouraged her son and avid LEGO enthusiast, Riley, to get involved in *FIRST* LEGO League at LCMS. Her brother was involved in the program at LCMS 15 years prior and now is an engineer, studying at University of Missouri-Rolla and Missouri S&T.

“They have done an impressive job and it is amazing the work they have put into it and the knowledge they have gained through each stage of creating their robot,” said LCMS teacher Beth Ayers. “Kim’s brother was encouraged to become an engineer through this program, and we hope these students will also gain experience and grow their interest in STEM careers through *FIRST*, as well.”

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