



CAMDENTON, Mo. -- Students in Camdenton are taking robotics to a global scale through their after school program known as LASER (Laker After school Science Engineering and Robotics) 3284. Students across the globe partake in these FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics competitions. The founder of FIRST Robotics is the famous inventor, Dean Kamen, best known as father of the Segway.

Grades two through twelve participate at Camdenton R-III schools. Nearly one fifth of Camdenton students are on a FIRST LASER team. LASER 3284 members are proud winners of the most prestigious FIRST Robotics award, known as the Chairman's Award.

In a couple weeks, they will be competing in Little Rock and St. Louis with high school students across the country. If they do well like they did last year, they will compete with and against students from across the world!

"This is our 2015 robot," shows Matthew Bigge, LASER 3284 Robotics Lead Programmer and President. After a seven hour school day, Matthew and his teammates work on their robots. "I work 3 to 4 hours a night," says Kylie Becker, FIRST LASER 3284 Robotics Member.

Plus, these students stay up late doing homework after. "I'm taking very rigorous courses so I have a lot of homework that I also have to get done," adds Kylie. "And that's on the weeknights. And then during weekends I'm here six to seven hours," adds Kyle Funke, FIRST LASER 3284 Robotics Member.

You may be wondering -- When do these kids eat? "Whenever I have time!" chuckles Kyle. "Every night we have dinner as a team," says Kylie.

"There's so much to do. You need to learn it --If you're behind and you have a part to work on then that could hurt the whole team," says Kyle. "To build a functioning robot from concept to working machine

in 45 days while still doing your day job is near impossible. If they can survive a robotics season they can survive anything!" says Mitch Comer, FIRST LASER 3284 Robotics Head Coach.

These students received a 180 page rule book with no instructions in January. Now, they are in the final week of their six week building period. "This year's game is called recycle rush," says Kyle. "The cool thing about our robot this year is that we have sensors that fully automate picking up the tote. So all you have to do is press one button and it will suck in a tote and raise it up all by itself," explains Matthew.

During their match, the LASER 3284 team has two minutes and 15 seconds to stack as many totes as they can. "The higher the stack of totes and recycle bins, the more points you get," explains Kyle. "My most proud moment was when we got this thing picking up totes and stacking them. "I was like 'Yeah! We got it working!'" recalls Matthew.

Mr. Comer brought first robotics to Camdenton six years ago. "As a technology teacher I like to give our students the why. The core classes do a great job but oftentimes students aren't satisfied and wonder why they need to know the geometry," says Mr. Comer.

Kyle says FIRST Robotics helps him do better in classes like Engineering. "I could see the connection between the measurements and math and how they relate to each other." "This program really gives them the why. It gives rationale to the curriculum. The thing about FIRST... it's not about the robot," says Mr. Comer. "Robotics is really so much more than that. It's public speaking, engineering, programming, public relations. I never imagined it was this big of a deal when I started in 7th grade," explains Kyle.

LASER 3284 members are big on community service and outreach. "We help spread STEM throughout our state and our country. We have reached the international level with a sponsor in Japan," explains Kyle.

FIRST members abide by core values. One term is coined "coopertition." "You're cooperating, yet you're still competing," explains Kyle. Another is termed "gracious professionalism." "Even in the heart of competition you still help the other teams. So if a team needs a part, you don't just shove them off. You give them the part and help them fix their robot," explains Kyle.

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