

Press Release

4-H Youth Development Forms First Lego League Robotics Teams

For Immediate Release

Charleston, WV - August 26, 2011: August 19th and 20th marked the beginning of the 4-H LEGO Robotics Teams in Kanawha County. Over thirty adults and youth attended the kick-off training hosted at the Kanawha County 4-H Extension Office. The training sponsored by WVU Extension Service and NASA Education Resource Center (ERC) educated youth and adults on team development and robotic software. At the end of the day and a half event, youth programmed robots to travel through a maze, around blockades using sensors and math skills. Each adult that agreed to coach a team received a robotic LEGO Mindstorm kit including a robot to begin team practice.

“There is great energy and momentum in Kanawha County for this robotics program.” states Sherry Swint WVU 4-H Extension Agent, “The youth are ready to get to work and be a part of a team. The parents are supporting their children one hundred percent. The time is right.”



Earlier this year Swint returned from a WVU 4-H Training where NASA ECR representative, Todd Ensign, spoke about a new partnership between WVU Extension and NASA to promote the First Lego League (FLL) Robotic competition to after-school groups across the state. The competition offers real world application of science and math concepts while students learn skills they can use for life, including respect, professionalism, teamwork, leadership and creativity. Returning to her home, she mentioned this new program and her spouse indicated that she needed to read a recent email he received. It was sent by a parent seeking help in starting a FLL team at the school where their

children attended. That first email was the spark that led to a county robotics program sponsored by 4-H.

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Five 4-H FLL Robotic Teams have been formed and plan to compete in the state competition. Several will train at the Kanawha County WVU Extension office as they prepare for the state competition. The competition will be held in Kanawha County this year at the Riverside High School in early December. Teams consist of from four to eight members in grades 4-8 and typically meet several times a month to design and build a robot that will answer problems posed in the competition challenge. One of the teams plan to develop an all-girls team. The teams also will be mentored by the state champions, the Mountaineer Area Robotics (MARS) organization located in Morgantown during their first year of competition. Additional support for teams will come from WVU Extension Service, NASA ERC, and the wonderful adult volunteers in our county.

This year's theme is Food Factor Challenge: Keeping Food Safe. Youth will explore the topic of food safety and examine the possible points of contamination our food encounters and find ways to prevent or combat these contaminants. For the competition, teams will build, test, and program an autonomous robot to solve a set of Food Safety missions as well as research, develop, and share their innovative food safety solutions.



There are two parts to the challenge. In the Robot Game activity teams build and program an autonomous robot using LEGO MINDSTORMS technology to score points on a themed playing field. In the second part of the challenge teams explore an actual problem that today's scientists and engineers are trying to solve. They will develop an innovative solution to that problem and creatively present their findings to judges.

“The teams are making plans to provide demonstrations at various events around our county,” said Benny Karnes, coach of one of the teams. “Our first exhibition will be at Hac3rCon, an Information Security conference for IT professionals in October.”

For more information on the Lego Robotics teams, contact Sherry Swint, 4-H Extension Agent at the WVU Kanawha County Extension Office at (304) 720-9573 or sherry.swint@mail.wvu.edu