

NWA Girl Scouts Put Robotics FIRST

"I'm a very, very competitive person. Programming robots is so much fun for me and this competition has taught me to be a better teammate," Caroline C. explains about her experiences in the robotics competitions.

It's no secret that Girl Scouts are getting more and more involved in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) programs and the benefits are becoming increasingly evident. From problem-solving to teamwork, girls are getting experience that will set them up for a bright future. A group of talented girls in Northwest Arkansas can attest to this trend, and express their passion for STEM through the FIRST program.

FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) is a non-profit designed to inspire young people's interest and participation in science and technology, and to motivate them to pursue education and career opportunities in STEM fields. Kids ages 6-18 can create a team

and participate in a program tailored to their age group, including: LEGO League Jr., LEGO League, Tech Challenge and Robotics Competition. According to the Girl Scout Research Institute, participants said that Girl Scouts' FIRST Robotics program has increased their interest in science or engineering (48 percent) and increased their interest in designing things (52 percent) more than other programs they have participated in.

Four Girl Scout troops in Northwest Arkansas have had an abundant amount of experience in the FIRST program, including team Whatchamacallits from Troops 5807, 5327 and 5605 and team Cookie Kickers from Troop 5327. The Whatchamacallits are currently in their fourth year of participating in FIRST Robotics Competition and team Cookie Kickers are in their third year of competing in FIRST Lego League.

The Robotics Competition gives students and their adult mentors the opportunity to work together to raise funds, design a team "brand," use teamwork skills, and build and program industrial-size robots to play against competitors, all within a six-week time frame. Guided by two or more adult coaches, FIRST Lego League teams are challenged to develop a solution to a real-world problem as well as design, build and program a robot.

August is a highly anticipated month every year as FIRST releases the project theme and teams come together to start brainstorming, team building, planning and creating their robot. Just four months later, regional competitions kick off, giving teams a limited amount of time to meet and prepare. Although the competitions include co-ed teams, the Whatchamacallits and Cookie Kickers proudly represent the Girl Scouts and have even



Members of the the Cookie Kickers work on their team project for FIRST Lego League.

Robotics, continued.

made a name for themselves. Team Whatchamacallits have had an impressive record at regionals, consistently placing in the top ten each year. Last year, the team took second place at the state competition.

Husband and wife duo, Sandra and Morgan Ware, have coached the two teams since they started, and two of the original Whatchamacallits, including their daughter Emily, currently serve as mentors for the girls. Sandra is not only the girls' coach, but has been the troop leader for Troops 5807, 5327 and 5605.

Caroline is the only returning member to team Whatchamacallits and recruited her friend Allison Y., who has had years of previous experience with robotics, to join the team for this year's Robotics Competition. Since the third grade, Allison has attended robotics camps and is

excited to put her skills to the test as a Whatchamacallit. When asked her thoughts on this new adventure, she explains, "I enjoy being part of this team because you work as one mind and collaborate multiple ideas."

This year, the theme of competition is Animal Allies and the Whatchamacallits are doing their project on deer and how they get hit by cars so frequently. After having previous success and new additions to the team, the girls are confident that this year is going to be even better than the last.

The Whatchamacallits and the Cookie Kickers are a great example of how Girl Scouts are taking the lead, all while having fun and making new friends. For information on becoming a Girl Scout, visit www.girlscoutsdiamonds.org and for more information on FIRST, visit www.firstinspires.org.



Team Whatchamacallits pose with the team's current FIRST Robotics Competition project.