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Robots Compete for Dominance in the Land of LEGOS during Annual Tournament

AIKEN, S.C. – December 28, 2016 – The FIRST LEGO League (FLL) Qualifier recently took place at Chukker Creek Elementary School in Aiken, S.C. The event was sponsored by a \$2,500 donation from Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS).

The ProgrAnimals, a family/community organization from the Aiken area, took top honors with the Champions Award. The champs, along with Bionic Monarchs, Chukker Creek Elementary; AP CavBots, Augusta Preparatory Day School; and the Lego Leaders and Creative Crazy Coders from Kennedy Middle School qualified to compete at the next level of competition.

“The volunteers were amazing, and we could not have covered our many expenses without the much appreciated donation from SRNS,” said Tournament Director and SRNS employee Tim Arnold. “Their support of the Aiken FIRST LEGO League Qualifier and the teams, to include the purchase of equipment and materials, such as laptop computers, was the glue that held all of this together.”

Since the robots and large competition area were all made of LEGO products, the thrilling and action-packed competition appeared to be tightly contested in “LEGO Land” rather than a school cafeteria.

Arnold, along with Chukker Creek teacher Alecia Kinard, ensured the day-long event went smoothly for the 20 teams from the Central Savannah River Area.

During the qualifier, pre-programmed robots autonomously scurried across the competition table performing a variety of tasks in an effort to accumulate as many points as possible within two and one-half minutes. Creativity, teamwork, versatility and efficient operations resulted in high scores, though penalty points could be assessed as well.



The ProgrAnimals, a family/community organization from the Aiken area, took top honors with the Champions Award at this year's FIRST LEGO League tournament, recently held at Chukker Creek Elementary school, qualifying them for a regional competition.

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“I don’t know who was more excited, the kids or me,” said Arnold. “We had nearly 200 students, grades fourth through eighth involved. And, what most people don’t realize is that the robotic competition on the tables is only one part of four that make up the event.”

According to Arnold, every year there is a different theme for the FLL Qualifier. This year’s theme is “Animal Allies,” where teams identify an animal-human interaction, whether intentional or unintentional, and then come up with a way to improve that interaction. This requires research, a plan and a presentation to judges demonstrating their level of success in this area, in addition to running robots.

Awards are also given for the quality and creativity in the robot design and programming.

“Another key component of FLL is the teaching of several core values, such as ‘We honor the spirit of friendly competition,’ which is ‘Coopertition,’ a special word emphasizing cooperation while competing,” said Arnold. “Each team has to give a presentation on how they implemented these core values, and are judged on that as well.”

According to Arnold, \$40,000 has been donated by SRNS to promote robotics and Project Lead the Way initiatives this year throughout the greater Aiken-Augusta area. “It’s making a real difference,” said Arnold. “The hands-on science and engineering that is the backbone of this type of extra-curricular activity jump starts and holds the students interest in learning about robotics. The fact that we use LEGO components for their robots and the competitive events themselves just adds to the fun and enthusiasm.”

Kinard noted that it is easy to see the direct impact this program has had on the students’ academic abilities and the learning of many important life lessons. “It changes their lives,” said Kinard. “This is where engineers, scientists and many other technical professionals are born. This kind of experience opens doors to a very bright future.” For Kinard, a fifth-grade teacher at Chukker Creek, it is her eighth year of robotics competition.

“I’ve always thought about being an engineer and inventor,” said Redcliffe Elementary School fifth-grader Jordan Boyd. “Our robotics program has shown me how things work, go together and how important it is to make the robot efficient to be successful.”

The Champions plus the five other highest performing teams will participate in the West Region South Carolina tournament on Jan. 14, in Easley, S.C. The winners from the West and East State Tournament go on to the World Tournament in Dallas, Texas.

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions is a Fluor-led company whose members are Fluor Federal Services, Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site, including the Savannah River National Laboratory, located near Aiken, South Carolina.

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