

Coventry and West Warwick students learn valuable lessons in robotics

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Our local students may not have been crowned victors, but they did walk away with medals from the 10th annual LEGO League Rhode Island Championship Event.

Students from both Coventry and West Warwick Schools participated in the event, which was hosted by Roger Williams University earlier this month.

The local teams competed against more than 50 other teams from across this state as well as parts of Massachusetts.

The competition is described as a hands-on science, technology, engineering and math enrichment program that combines the excitement of robotics with a research project that encourages scientific literacy.

Each year the basis of the competition varies and this year the contestants were asked to explore how to heal or repair human body systems with biotechnology and biomedical engineering. They were also required to design, build and program a robot to complete missions on a pre-built game table where the missions represent concepts from biomedical engineering.

How the competition works is that each of the teams compete in several two-and-a-half minute matches to earn points as their robots complete missions on the playing field, which is made entirely of LEGO elements. Then each team presents a research project that highlights what they have learned about saving and improving lives with biomedical engineering to a panel of volunteer experts from the community acting as judges.

The teams, each one comprised of up to 10 students ages 9-14, vie for awards in categories such as Robot Design, Robot Strategy, Research Quality, and Teamwork. The team earning the highest cumulative score across all judging categories wins the coveted Champion's Award and advances to the FIRST LEGO League World Festival, where they will compete alongside 30 other teams. Although our local students didn't actually win that title this year, their coaches said that their teams both did "very well."

Roland Hebert, the coach for the West Warwick team, which was comprised of four competitors, Austin Raymond, Danny Romano, Steven Russell and Jon Arnold, and two coaches, Hebert being one of them, and Crystal Greco, a former competitor who has aged out of the competition, but still joins the club on a weekly basis as a high school student because she said she enjoys the program so much, said that the team did great.

"The team did not win any awards this year," Hebert said. "They did however have a great time and most importantly it was a good learning experience."

The group from Coventry, which is made up of six students from the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School, did not officially place in the competition either, but according to their coach, Rebecca Henderson, who is also the robotics teacher at the school, they did do very well.

"This year's team consisted of new and old members and they



invest many long hours, hard work, and dedication from September until the competition where they put forth to bring their best effort," Henderson said. "For some of these students, building a robot was something new, some had never programmed before, or conducted such a detailed research project. Others on the team have had extensive background information in these areas helping to balance out the efforts. This was a true example of teamwork, exhausted by all, old and new members.

"Overall I think the competition went well even though the team did not officially place in any of the new ranking systems by the judges," she said. "As the day went on and they competed in several robot rounds, their score continually improved and as a coach I couldn't have asked for a better outcome for such a well rounded group of students. They had fun while learning something new that they can now take with them to future competitions."

The Coventry team is made up of six students; Jake Huling, 7th grade, Ciana Martino, 6th grade, Austin Gill, 8th grade, Trevor Campbell, 7th grade, Alec Ballotti, 7th grade, and Ben Jackvony, is in 6th grade.

Submitted Photo

The Coventry team took part in the 10th Annual LEGO League Rhode Island Championship Event at Roger Williams College earlier this month.

At top left: Alec Ballotti and Trevor Campbell.

Bottom left: Team Photo

Top right: Ciana Martino and Trevor Campbell