

Area girls who've honed skills at robotics head to Philly competition



TIMES LEADER STAFF PHOTO/MAGALY RUGGIERO

From left, Samantha Ruppert, Jennie Hampton and Catherine Sullivan work on a Lego robot in the Wyoming Valley Mall parking lot Friday before heading to Philadelphia for a robot competition.

Young tech fans are programmed for success

By MARK GUYDISH
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WILKES-BARRE TWP. — It seemed like a reasonable question. Why do you need a Lego robot with a dumper?

"To dump the food loops!" several of the GigaDivas said as though it were obvious.

Dump food loops? Ah, that would be one of the tasks their little automatons — snapped together out of colorful Lego bricks — must perform today during the fourth annual "FIRST Lego Robot Challenge" at Philadelphia's Franklin Institute.

Two teams of area girls have spent months designing, building and programming robots to do

eight tasks — each intended to roughly mimic work necessary for city living on a small scale.

One of those duties is to collect and transport dangling loops representing food. Others include moving "toxic barrels," manipulating a switch to repair a bridge, turning on a windmill and clearing "rocks" from a field. It's a lot to ask from a couple robots you can hold in your hands.

But you might be wondering more what a GigaDiva is than why Legos need food loops. Fair enough. They are girls who have shown a strong interest in computers and math, and who get together regularly to explore that world — especially during summer camps organized by Peggy Sullivan.

The camp, held at Wilkes University, is for girls in their pre- or early teens "to try to keep them interested in math and computers at an age when girls tend to lose interest," Sullivan said.

The camps started three years ago with some grant money and expanded into winter this year when Sullivan heard about the annual robot competition.

Grant money has run out, but the effort goes on — although Sullivan concedes they had to start charging for a camp that was previously free.

Friday afternoon the GigaDivas — nine in all — met in the

Wyoming Valley Mall parking lot to caravan to Philadelphia. The teams took advantage of an invitation for contestants to sleep in the institute Friday night.

This was an eager bunch, gladly crouching to show off their creations on the parking lot.

That's for rotation! It's not supposed to come off! Catherine Sullivan — Peggy's daughter, said as another girl accidentally popped a piece off a robot.

Although it can be tricky designing the robots — one used tracks, the other ran on wheels — it's at least as challenging to program them, Sullivan said.

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LEGO

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The machines include little computers, and the kids must write, test and rewrite programs until the robots do their duties by themselves.

On the plus side, the Lego programming language is very visual: Lego bricks on a computer screen represent various functions for the robot.

None of the GigaDivas seemed very competitive. Asked if they

were going to win in Philadelphia, they either laughed or shrugged. But that doesn't mean they don't value their work.

After demonstrating their robots, Catherine Sullivan pulled one from Samantha Ruppert's hands.

"I don't trust you with this," Catherine said with a laugh.

For more information on the GigaDivas, go to <http://www.gigadivas.org> on the Web.

Mark Guydish, a Times Leader staff writer, may be reached at 829-7161.

Programs run on girl power

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Catherine Sullivan, an 11-year-old Lake-Lehman student, and Mickey Kahla, a 12-year-old St. Nicholas-St. Mary's student, personalize their Lego robot with decorations at Wilkes University's GigaDiva Camp.

Some ideas on how to be a happy camper

By ELLEN TOMSON
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

Choosing a summer camp for your child can seem like a big deal, and it is. Safety, security, the possibility of homesickness, boredom or unhappiness, as well as the money spent are all important issues.

Camp specialists agree, though, there are lots of ways parents, other adult caregivers and children can increase the likelihood of a positive camp experience.

First, find out as much as you can about the camp you are considering. Now is the time many camps sponsor information nights in communities where prospective campers live. Often, camps will provide the names of families in your area who have experience with their programs. Camps commonly sponsor visiting days and tours, too, for prospective campers and their families. Visiting the Web sites of particular camps is another way to obtain information.

Meeting and talking with a camp staff member or camp director is a good idea, says John Duntley, YMCA of Greater St. Paul (Minn.) vice president for camping services.

Questions to consider asking: How long has the camp been operating? What is the hiring process for counselors and other staff? What kinds of training does the staff receive? How do you make sure standards are maintained while campers are present? What is the return rate of staff? (Anything over 50 percent is excellent.)

The stamp of industry approval in the form of accreditation by the American Camping Association is important. Accreditation means the

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Alyson McRiley plays the piano at the Empowerment Camp talent show recently.

By MARY THERESA BIEREL
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Anna Scott and Alanna Yocum, both 11, sat cross-legged on the floor in a Wilkes University classroom on Tuesday and started to build a robot.

"Math, I definitely have to say it's the best subject ever," Anna said, grinning as she dug through a box of Legos for a needed part.

Instructor Peggy Sullivan smiles at that enthusiasm. By holding two, 10-day GigaDiva (Girls Investigating, Girls Achieving) Camps this summer, Wilkes is determined to nurture adolescent girls' aptitude for mathematics and computer science.

Research has shown middle school is the age when some girls lose interest in the more technical subjects — and the GigaDiva organizers want to offset that tendency in a girls-only environment.

"They feel more free to troubleshoot and do what they're doing here," Sullivan said as eight girls hooked wheels and battery packs together. "They don't stand back and let the boys take over."

This group of GigaDivas will meet through the end of June on the Wilkes-Barre campus, and a second group will meet July 15-26. Call 408-4814 for information.

The sessions, partially funded by a state Link-to-Learn grant, include such activities as designing computer games, a Web site and T-shirts, producing a movie and programming robots.

"You can make them dance," said Alanna, who has programmed robots to move forward and backward, zigzag and — once, for a science fair — brush teeth.

College Misericordia, too, has sensed a need to bolster girls' confidence and desire to achieve.

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Activities to fill your summer

Naturally, you don't have to be a girl to go to camp.

Any youngster fascinated by volcanoes, fly fishing, music or a dozen other interests can find a specialty camp this summer. There are traditional day camps, as well, where the focus is on swimming, hiking, crafts and sports.

Here is a partial list of some summer opportunities.

Performing Arts Institute at Wyoming Seminary in Kingston, from July 1 through Aug. 11, will offer classical, jazz and stage music, dance and musical theater to high school students. Programs for younger musicians, ages 7 to 13, will be offered July 15 to Aug. 10. Call 270-2186.

Summer at Sem programs include science, math, art and literature as well as an English-as-a-second-language program for students from other countries. Programs run from July 1 to 26. Call 270-2186.

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GIRL

Continued from 1B

At Empowerment Camp last week on the Dallas Township campus, college women led about 30 high school girls through exercises that showed the difference between assertively standing up for yourself and the unpleasant extremes of passive and aggressive behavior.

"I always get my way even if I need to step on people to get there," 13-year-old GAR High School student Julie Budzyn said, drawing laughter as she leaned into another girl's space to play the role of a bully.

After the session, 15-year-old

Amanda Evans from Hanover Area said she has a handle on assertive behavior.

If someone asked her for homework help, she wouldn't let them copy her answers, because that would be passive. She wouldn't yell at them to stop bothering her, either, because that would be aggressive.

So what would she do?

"I'd help them, but I wouldn't do it for them," she said.

Many of the girls at Empowerment Camp said they know fellow students who deliberately give wrong answers at school, even when they know the correct answer.

"I notice it sometimes with my

friends. They don't want to appear too smart," said 14-year-old Jessica Hooker, who also attends GAR. "But if you want boys to like you, you shouldn't have to pretend. They should like you for who you are."

Some girls don't raise their hands in class at all because they don't want to risk appearing foolish — or intelligent.

"It's about 50-50," said Evans, who doesn't appreciate when boys tease girls about being the teachers' pets.

Because Empowerment Camp was also an all-girl experience, counselor Cindy March said nobody had to worry about that kind of teasing.

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GIRL

Continued from 3B

"This camp is our response to research that about the time girls reach middle school — in seventh and eighth grade — they lose their voices. Up to that point they're confident, involved and outspoken. Then peer pressure gets in the way. We want to give their voices back."

March cited the 1995 book, "Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls" by Mary Pipher as inspiration for Empowerment Camp, which was supported by grants from the Sisters of Mercy and Procter & Gamble.

Pipher, a clinical psychologist from Nebraska, calls American society "a girl-poisoning culture" that "limits girls' development, truncates their wholeness and leaves many of them traumatized."

"What can we do to help them?"

"I'm not saying girls are better than boys. You can be a girl and work hard to be the best you can be, or you can be a boy and do the same thing. It's all about the effort you give."

—Anna Best, 12

Pipher asks. "We can strengthen girls so that they will be ready. We can encourage emotional toughness and self-protection. We can support and guide them. But most important, we can change our culture. We can work together to build a culture that is less complicated and more nurturing, less violent and sexualized and more growth-producing. Our daughters deserve a society in which all their gifts can be developed and appreciated."

Girls at both local camps found plenty of role models to help them appreciate their gifts — from GigaDiva aide Katie Green, who didn't mind being one of only three girls in a 20-student computer class at Wyalusing High School, to Empowerment Camp staffer Laura Pistoia, who talked about self-esteem.

"A lot of people start out low, and then they get to know themselves better, and it gets higher," Pistoia said.

And some of the young campers sounded like strong role models themselves.

"I've heard of people saying science isn't for girls or math isn't for girls because you have to use your brain. You know, sarcasm," said self-described "Lego whiz" Anna Best, 12, who is enrolled in the accelerated program at Wyoming Area. "I'm not saying girls are better than boys. You can be a girl and work hard to be the best you can be, or you can be a boy and do the same thing. It's all about the effort you give."

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3 join Wilkes University faculty

Wilkes recently held an orientation session for new faculty members who join the University this fall. Three of them live in the Back Mountain.

Dr. Sally Bormann is an assistant professor of English in the Department of Humanities. A native of Minneapolis, she previously worked as an assistant professor of English at Western Montana College of the University of Montana. Bormann's experiences abroad include teaching at People's University in the People's Republic of China, Beijing; teaching English to children in Kaohsiung, Taiwan; and she studied for a year in Salzburg, Austria.

After earning a bachelor's degree in both Humanities and German, Bormann received a master's degree and doctorate in English Language and Literature from the University of Michigan. She lives in Shavertown.

Mary F. McManus, R.Ph., Ph.D., formerly from Long Island, N.Y., is an associate professor of Pharmaceutical Sciences. During her five years with the Arnold & Marie Schwartz College of Phar-

macy and Health Sciences, Long Island University, she served as assistant professor of pharmacology/toxicology and assistant director of continuing professional education.

She has also worked as an adjunct professor of the graduate program at St. John's University, College of Pharmacy & Allied Health Professions. McManus, a New York State Registered Pharmacist, earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Pharmacy and a Doctor of Philosophy Degree from St. John's. She lives in Shavertown.

Margaret R. Sullivan, of Lehman, is a visiting assistant professor of Mathematics. She has an extensive teaching experience, having worked as an instructor at Louisiana State University; as a graduate assistant at SUNY Binghamton; a visiting assistant professor at Broome Community College; and an adjunct professor at both Penn State Wilkes-Barre and Wilkes.

Sullivan earned both a bachelor's and master's degree in Mathematics from Louisiana State University.

Wilkes University News

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New Faculty Joins Wilkes University Family (Editors, Note Connection to Your Coverage Area)

Wilkes-Barre -- Wilkes recently held an orientation session for 11 new faculty members who join the University this fall.

New Jersey native Kristin C. Bewick is an assistant professor of Education. Since 1999, she has served as an adjunct instructor at King's College and as a graduate mentor at Marywood University. For the past eight years, she has worked as a private tutor in all academic areas, with emphasis on reading skills, study techniques, and cognitive and learning strategies.

Currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Education at Marywood, Bewick earned her master's degree in Special Education/Reading and bachelor's degree, with a major in Special Education and minor in communication disorders, from Marywood.

-MORE-

1st Add: New Faculty Joins Wilkes University

A native of New Jersey, Bewick earned post-bachelor credits in Speech Pathology and Elementary Education from Kean College, in Union, N.J.

Dr. Sally Bormann is an assistant professor of English in the Department of Humanities. A native of Minneapolis, Minn., she previously worked as an assistant professor of English at Western Montana College of the University of Montana.

Bormann's experiences abroad include teaching at People's University in the People's Republic of China, Beijing; teaching English to children in Kaohsiung, Taiwan; and she studied for a year in Salzburg, Austria.

After earning a bachelor's degree in both Humanities and German, Bormann received a master's degree and doctorate in English Language and Literature from the University of Michigan.

Wilkes alumna, Concetta M. DeMarco, is an instructor in the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science. A native of Philadelphia, she has taught Quantitative Reasoning as an adjunct faculty member at King's. She also taught a variety of mathematics courses as an adjunct at Keystone College, in La Plume, Pa., and served as a professional tutor there. DeMarco earned a bachelor's degree in Mathematics and Chemistry from Alvernia College in 1992 and a master's in Mathematics from Wilkes this past May.

Jermyn, Pa. resident, Dr. Edward Foote, is an associate professor of Pharmacy Practice in the Nesbitt School of Pharmacy. Foote comes to Wilkes from the College of Pharmacy at Rutgers University, in Piscataway, N.J., where he served as assistant professor of pharmacy practice.

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2nd Add: New Faculty Joins Wilkes University

For the past five years, he has also worked as an adjunct assistant professor of Medicine in the Division of Nephrology and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of N.J./Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

Foote received his Bachelor of Science Degree in Pharmacy and Doctor of Pharmacy Degree from the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science. He is board certified as a pharmacotherapy specialist and is licensed in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Minnesota and New Jersey.

An associate professor in the Department of Social Sciences and Communications, Eric W. Hoffman moved to Wilkes-Barre from Jupiter, Florida. At Florida State University, in Tallahassee, he served as a teaching assistant in media productions. At Lynn University in Boca Raton, Flor., he worked as an assistant professor in Communication and instructor in Communication.

Hoffman is pursuing a Doctorate of Philosophy in Mass Communication from Florida State University. He earned a Master of Science in Marketing Communication and Information Technology from FSU in 1992.

Mary F. McManus, R.Ph., Ph.D., formerly from Long Island, N.Y., is an associate professor of Pharmaceutical Sciences. During her five years with the Arnold & Marie Schwartz College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Long Island University at University Plaza, in Brooklyn, N.Y., she served as assistant professor of pharmacology/toxicology and assistant director of continuing professional education.

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3rd Add: New Faculty Joins Wilkes University

She has also worked as an adjunct professor of the graduate program at St. John's University, College of Pharmacy & Allied Health Professions, in Jamaica, N.Y.

McManus, a New York State Registered Pharmacist, earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Pharmacy and a Doctor of Philosophy Degree from St. John's.

Atlanta, Georgia native, Dr. Jennifer Poulos Nesbitt, is an assistant professor of English. At Emory University, she was a visiting assistant professor, English instructor, teaching associate, and graduate assistant. Nesbitt was also a Dean's Teaching Fellow at Oxford College of Emory University. This past spring, she was an instructor of English at Agnes Scott College, in Decatur, Georgia.

Nesbitt graduated magna cum laude, receiving an A.B. in History and Literature from Harvard University. She received an M.A. in English, a certificate in Women's Studies, and her Ph.D. in English from Emory University.

Barbara Nostrand, Ph.D., is an associate professor of Computer Science. She's previously worked as an assistant professor of CS at both Bradley University, Simpson College, and Philander Smith College. She earned two Bachelor of Arts Degrees from Central Washington State College — one in Philosophy and the other in Mathematics.

At Northeastern University, Nostrand completed the Master of Science program in Dynamic System Modeling and Formal Languages and a Ph.D., with the dissertation Chiral Honeycombs. Currently, she is pursuing a Master of Arts Degree through the University of Toronto. Her thesis is Women in Kyogen. Nostrand is a native of Richland, Washington.

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4th Add: New Faculty Joins Wilkes University

Born in Shanghai, China, Dr. Youyu Phillips, of Scranton, is a visiting assistant professor of Chemistry. Since 1994, she has served as an adjunct associate professor at Wilkes, and, since 1995, she's worked as an adjunct professor at Northampton Community College's Monroe Campus, in Tannersville, Pa.

Phillips received a certificate in Chemistry and a Master of Science Degree in Chemistry from Shanghai Teachers' College of Technology in China. She also earned a Doctorate of Philosophy in Chemistry from the University of Ottawa, in Ontario, Canada.

Margaret R. Sullivan, of Lehman, Pa., is a visiting assistant professor of Mathematics. She has an extensive teaching experience, having worked as an instructor at Louisiana State University; as a graduate assistant at SUNY Binghamton; a visiting assistant professor at Broome Community College; and an adjunct professor at both Penn State Wilkes-Barre and Wilkes. Sullivan earned both a bachelor's and master's degree in Mathematics from Louisiana State University.

Dr. Terry Zipay, from Columbus, Ohio, is the new chairperson and a professor for the Department of Visual and Performing Arts. He has served a number of teaching posts throughout his career, most recently as Dean of the Conservatory of Music at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio. He supervised 45 employees, doubled enrollment, expanded programs of the Community Music School, initiated student-to-student orientation program and implemented a technology requirement for freshmen.

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5th Add: New Faculty Joins Wilkes University

Zipay earned a Bachelor of Music Degree from Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester and a Master of Music Degree from the University of Arizona. He received a doctorate in Music History and Art History from State University of New York at Buffalo.

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Photo:

(Front Row, Left to Right) Dr. Jane Elmes-Crahall, of Larksville, Associate Professor of Communications and Chair of the Faculty Affairs Council; Kristin Bewick, of Moscow, Pa., Dr. Youyu Phillips, of Scranton, Pa., Concetta DeMarco, of Factoryville, Pa., and Dr. James P. Rodechko, of Wilkes-Barre, Vice President for Academic Affairs

(Middle Row, Left to Right) Dr. Terry Zipay, of Wilkes-Barre, Dr. Barbara Nostrand, of Wilkes-Barre, Dr. Jennifer P. Nesbitt, of Wilkes-Barre, and Mary McManus, of Shavertown, Pa.

(Top Row, Left to Right) Eric W. Hoffman, of Wilkes-Barre, Dr. Sally Bormann, of Shavertown, Pa., Dr. Edward Foote, of Jermy, Pa., and Margaret Sullivan, of Lehman, Pa.

