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YOUTH—Robot competitions spark science interest; lead to \$120,000 in school savings

CONTACT TIM EWERS at tewers@uidaho.edu; also see www.usfirst.org

WHEN POST FALLS 3rd and 4th graders decided to enter a make-a-robot competition in 2007, they had no idea the challenge would help them save their school district \$120,000 a year.

Five girls and three boys in the Panic Stricken Brains Chickens team from Ponderosa Elementary had to build and program a robot to complete up to 13 tasks for an Idaho-wide competition staged in Meridian on January 26.

Their second requirement in the international FIRST LEGO League (FLL) tournament also required them and other Idaho teams, to study energy uses and seek ways to save energy in a building. The Brains Chickens discovered that each computer left on at their school 24/7 cost \$11.03 a month in electricity. Cost drops to \$2.78 when computers are powered only 9 hours each weekday. If all the district's 1,600 computers cooperate, savings could exceed \$120,000 a year.

Idaho Superintendent of Schools Tom Luna is so impressed he's asked for copies of the Post Falls elementary students' report.

Tim Ewers, UI's Moscow-based 4-H specialist, co-leads a new Idaho Robotics Program with Jean Teasdale, UI assistant dean for research and student outreach in the College of Engineering. Idaho 4-H now collaborates with the older UI-sponsored robotics program designed to make math, science, and engineering fun for youth. The Idaho Space Grant Consortium, sponsored by NASA and the UI College of Engineering, has promoted robotics competitions among Idaho 5th and 6th graders for some 13 years. Becky Highfill coordinates that program.

Ewers and Teasdale are creating a pipeline of programs to make science exciting and fun for Idaho youth throughout their K-12 journey. New 4-H programs will bring in younger and older children through school teams, regional and state competitions, and after-school programs. Idaho may be the first state with such a comprehensive plan.

Judging by the roar, laughter, and cheering as 34 teams of some 240 Idaho youth competed at Meridian's January 26 championship, the pipeline holds great promise.

Karlicia Berry, coordinator of the North Idaho Robotics4Kids program, expects to quadruple Post Falls participation next year. She finds the program "awesome because robots capture the children's imaginations. It's so empowering for kids to get on a computer, write a program, and make a robot respond. These 9-year-olds research global problems that real scientists face and are offering local solutions."

Teens design a meth education program

CONTACT BARBARA BROMLEY-BRODY at bbrody@uidaho.edu

CASCADE TEENS knew they wanted education about methamphetamine but not just from local law-enforcement personnel. Instead, they wanted to hear from people who had used meth, been damaged by it, or watched relatives die from it.

Through 4-H's national "Engaging Youth, Serving Community" initiative, the teens partnered with local adults to plan a "family night out" that drew 235 area residents on a Friday night last March. Besides organizing a panel

discussion that engaged hearts and minds, they invited sponsors of public, private, and faith-based youth activities to show-and-tell what else there is to do when days seem long but money is short.

Some area organizations have already responded with new youth activities and with partnerships to develop even more, says Barbara Bromley-Brody, Valley County Extension educator.

Idaho Vets tell stories for Library of Congress

CONTACT SUE PHILLEY at sphilley@uidaho.edu; MICHAEL ADAMS at Invhp_TheVeteransHistoryProject@verizon.net

STORIES of Idaho veterans are becoming part of the Library of Congress permanent record, thanks in part to a \$1,000 grant from the University of Idaho 4-H Operation: Military Kids project.

"The project reaches out to veterans and raises public awareness of their contributions to our country," said Sue Philley, Caldwell, 4-H program head. "These are goals shared by Operation: Military Kids," which supports children of deployed military families.

Trained volunteers conduct videotaped interviews, which are saved on DVDs. Participating veterans get a copy as does the Library of Congress and the Coeur d'Alene Public Library. "Most are World War II and Korean vets," says Michael Adams, a sergeant during the Vietnam conflict and current commander at Legion Post #14 in Coeur d'Alene, who runs the program.

"Their stories are very important," says Adams. "We hear a lot of good detail about bootcamp, transportation, and, for example, what it was like to be a SEAL with the U.S. Navy in North Africa."

DID YOU KNOW?

30,272

NUMBER OF IDAHO YOUTH WHO PARTICIPATED IN UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO EXTENSION 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN 2007.

Source: 4-H Annual Report 2007, <http://www.4h.uidaho.edu/>