

New robotics program for Circle of Friends

By Jodi Schneider McNamee
Correspondent

Programing, or coding, is taking schools all over the world by storm. And robotics is another field that's able to inspire kids to learn coding.

"A Lego Robotics workshop/program is something we've been trying to get put together for the mentored kids since I came on board last April," said Nicky Merritt, Circle of Friends executive director.

Robotics is a hands-on learning approach that is

about providing the student with opportunities to experiment with building things as a form of problem-solving through coding.

"Today's young people are immersed in technology, and most of that technology is intangible and difficult to conceptualize," Merritt said. "The Circle of Friends kids can connect with robotics quickly because they are able to touch the robots and manipulate them directly. Robotics builds confidence by building with robots, and the kids can create their own

devices and gadgets that interact with the world. The kids learn to see robotics as a fun hobby rather than as a strictly educational activity."

Last year Circle of Friends received a grant and the former executive director Debbie Newport and Kelly Davis Martin purchased a few Lego Robotics Mindstorms kits.

The kits are a hardware/software platform for the development of programmable robots based on Lego building blocks.

Essentially, a robot is a mechanical device that can be programmed to follow a set of instructions.

"Our kits are creative traditional Lego sets that come with instruction manuals," explained Merritt. "These instruction manuals will help set the groundwork for the kids to build skill and trust and increase their confidence. The goal is for our mentored kids to learn to set aside the instruction manuals. Eventually, they will learn that their own imaginations are the most powerful 'instruction manuals' ever to exist."

Bodie Dachtler, a seventh-grader who was on a Lego



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Nicky Merritt supervising kids learning about robotics.

Robotics team, volunteered his expertise as facilitator last Wednesday at the Circle of Friends Clubhouse to teach the kids the basic groundwork for the monthly robotics program.

"I really enjoy the building part of robotics and was in a Lego Robotics program for three years," Dachtler said. "I've always liked techy stuff and I wanted to be on a Robotics team. So, me and my mom basically put a club together, organized meetings and it grew from there."

Last year at the Sisters Science Fair, The Robotics Club had working displays to challenge the imagination.

Sisters resident Joan Upshaw is a mentor to an 11-year-old who is very excited about the new robotics program.

"He considers himself an engineer and loves building things," Upshaw told *The Nugget*.

"We are going to try to get a core bunch of kids that have the interest in possibly competing as we proceed in the school year we are hoping their interest grows," Merritt said. "We're hoping that they will be committing to more workshops through the summer to be able to ramp up to go to the regional competition in the fall."



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Bodie Dachtler helping Circle kids with robotics.

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