

Village Home students rack up slew of state awards

BY CHRISTINA LENT

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The Village Home Education Resource Center in Beaverton is turning out academic champions left and right.

Three teams of students and one ace speller from the learning community for families who home educate their children will represent Oregon and the Pacific Northwest in national and international competitions in the coming weeks.

Village Home's Lego robotics "Team Um" traveled Tuesday to Atlanta as one of only 15 teams invited to the FIRST Lego League World Festival.

It's all-girl robotics "Fire-Breathing Rubber Duckies" team will advance to the FIRST Lego League National Competition in Dayton, Ohio, after claiming top honors at state.

Regional spelling champion Connor Aberle, 13, is heading to Washington, D.C., after securing a spot in the Scripps-Howard Spelling Bee.

And, Village Home's Destination Imagination team will return to the Global Finals in Knoxville, Ten., in May for the second year after winning its division and two Renaissance Awards at state.

So what is the secret to their success?

"We really work together very well, we all work really hard and we have great coaches," said Taytlyn Fitzgerald of the Fire-Breathing Rubber Duckies. "We also use our individual talents, which are all different, to benefit the entire team. We have great programmers, great builders and great presenters."

They also have a ton of fun together, she said.

Innovative designs also helped both Lego teams to excel in completing missions during matches, said Peter Warila, 14, of Team Um.

But what gave his team the edge was more about the bond shared by its members.

"We are all friends, and that helps a lot," he said. "Some of the teams we were up against were put together by their schools – they didn't really know each other and that makes it harder to work as a team."

That teamwork also played a key role for the "We Don't Know" Destination Imagination team.

"We all work really well together," said Jevon Streicher, a 13-year-old on the Destination Imagination team.

For Aberle, success comes with preparation and support.

"I've been studying languages of origin and root words," he said of his preparation for the national spelling bee. "My mom has also been helping me all the way and my family is really supportive."



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HOME EXHIBITION — The Fire-Breathing Rubber Duckies demonstrate how their Lego robot performs tasks in front of their Village Home peers Tuesday. From left are Charlotte Smythe, Tesca Fitzgerald, Kendra Burton and Taytlyn Fitzgerald.

Village Home students gathered together Tuesday in a show of support for all of its champions.

“This is our chance to celebrate their success and show them some excitement to let them know that we will all be cheering for them as they go off for nationals and globals,” said Lori Walker, executive director of the community of 265 preschool through high school students. “These are tremendous learning opportunities for them that are a lot of fun and allow for real, integrated learning.”

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