

# Local 4-H Robotics teams qualify for state competition



By **RENEE WELLS**

## *The Voice*

BURLEY – Today’s young students understand computers, so it takes dedication for parents to step up and mentor programs when they know less than those they are “teaching.”

But that is what two local moms did recently, and they are excited to be going with their 4-H clubs to Moscow in December to compete in a statewide FIRST Robotics competition at the University of Idaho.

It all started when Declo teenager Jamison Burton attended a Robotics Workshop at CSI. His mother, Carrie Burton, was able to secure a grant from the Cassia County 4-H Leaders Council to attend with her 16-year-old on. The rest is technology and might be above some heads – but not those of the youth participating.

“He was so excited and wanted to get a robotics team started here,” Burton said.

“So we dove in headlong, not really understanding what it would entail; and it has been such a positive experience for these kids, we just want to keep it going.”

And while they have had some frustrations as they have learned all about this very in-depth and complicated program, the two teams, consisting of 10 youngsters in junior high and high school, are on their way to Moscow for the state contest, where they will compete against about 60 teams. A third team, from Burley Jr. High School, also participated, but did not qualify for the state competition.

“One team (the Robo Rebels) had really good luck at Saturday’s contest in Twin Falls,” said Burton,

“But we (the Hotwires) had a hard time getting our robot to do what it was supposed to do.”

“We” does not include Burton, as the team of six youngsters are required to perform their exercises on their own without the help of leaders and/or parents. They did manage, despite the problems they encountered, to qualify for the state competition, and they have a couple opportunities between now and Dec. 17, when they go to Moscow, to improve on their presentation.

“We were able to get our robot to do almost all the required tasks,” said Wendy Lewis, who is the leader for the Robo Rebel 4-H Club.

“Now, the task before us is to get all the funding we need to get up to the competition.”

The 4-H clubs will demonstrate their robotics programs at the 4-H 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday open house being held Friday, from 4:30-6:30 p.m. at the Cassia County Extension office at CSI Mini-Cassia Center.

With available grants from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) the local 4-H leaders are hoping to see more Robotics clubs started up in the area.

“It is time consuming and it’s very much like being involved in sports,” Burton said.

“From around the first of the year, through March, we’ll be having nightly practices.”

Lewis and Burton have volunteered to train other 4-H leaders who would like to get involved in the FIRST Robotics programs. They encourage participation because it is much more than just a 4-H project.

“There is so much money available for these kids for scholarships when they graduate,” Burton said.

“And all they have to do is be associated with the FIRST program to qualify for those dollars. And besides all that, the kids just have so much fun together doing this.”

Burton emphasized that youngsters who want to get involved (and leaders) do not have to be in 4-H to do so. There are also opportunities for school and even private organizations to get involved.

Another thing they are hoping to promote is the involvement of girls in the program.

“We saw only a couple girls involved down there and we’d really like to get more girls involved,” Burton said.

The trophies brought home by the teams this year from the Twin Falls Qualifier included Robot Performance Award, Project Award and Robot Design Award.

Cassia County 4-H Director Rosie Davids praised the two women for their dedication to the new program.

“They really deserve to be patted on the back,” Davids said.

“This is a challenging program and they have not only helped these kids qualify for the state competition in the first year, but they are also willing to help anyone else who might be interested in getting into this program. They have agreed to help train new leaders.”

Davids said donations would be accepted to help the teams get to their Moscow competition.