

Robotics team wins for first time, recognized for community work

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POCATELLO, Idaho -

In the first week of their competition season, a local high school robotics team made big wins, but the team is building more than just robots.

Last week, Pocatello's 4H LiveWire Robotics team won the Inland Empire Regional in California with their robot SpudLink. This is the team's first robotic competition win. They also won the prestigious Chairman's Award.

"It's really an amazing experience and shows what you can really do with a small group of really determined kids," said team captain Kip Stahlecker.

The competition is put on by For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, better known as FIRST. Each year, FIRST gives teams six weeks to build a robot to use to compete in a game they create. After they finish building it or after the six weeks are up, the teams have to wrap their robots in plastic because they're not allowed to work on them until they arrive at their competitions.

While this is LiveWire's first robot competition win, this is the third time they've won the Chairman's Award. The award is meant to recognize a team's efforts in spreading STEM education in their communities.

Community outreach is a big focus for LiveWire and many members are honored by the award.

"Everyone's trying to win the same award and some have more resources than others," said team presenter and programmer Aaron Ludwig. "It feels really great to win an award against so much competition."

The team has published four robot-themed children's books and reads them to kids through their Reading Robots Rock storytelling events. After reading their books, the team also holds robot demonstrations.

Stahlecker says these events are to show real world applications of STEM education.

"All of our kids are so dedicated because all of us have seen the true value of FIRST," said Stahlecker. "We really want to share that and STEM education with our whole community."

The team is also affiliated with Idaho State University's College of Technology. Members come from all three high schools in Pocatello, Blackfoot High School and several home-schooled students in Southeast Idaho.

Thanks to their win, LiveWire secured a spot in the international championships in St. Louis. The team is also traveling to Canada for the Western Canada Regional, both are happening in April.