

Engineering with LEGOS

Central Lyon middle school LEGO League to compete in Sioux Falls

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LEGOs are the world's favorite interlocking toy brick system. From constructing castles and pirate ships to skyscrapers and cars, LEGOs inspire kids (and adults) everywhere to use their imagination and practice critical thinking. LEGOs can be used for more than playtime, however. Central Lyon offers First LEGO League as an extracurricular activity for middle school students. First LEGO League is a precursor to high school robotics, giving kids a head start in pursuing their STEM-related interests by creating robots from LEGOs.

This year, there are 22 middle school students in First LEGO League from fifth to eighth grade. This year's challenge is Energize, during which teams reimagine the future of sustainable energy. Students explore where energy comes from and how it is stored, distributed and used. The Central Lyon teams visited with several local groups who work in the engineering and energy fields, like DGR Engineering, to inspire their projects.

Eric Arnold is the fifth and sixth grade computer sciences teacher at Central Lyon and the First LEGO League advisor. This is his first year overseeing the program which he took over from Jerry Pytleski.

"First LEGO League is an opportunity for kids to learn the engineering process. It allows a group of middle school students to learn how to use the engineering process, which is everything from problem formation and discovery to brainstorming, prototyping and revising the prototype until they get a robot they're satisfied with. The kids are also learning the principles of teamwork," said Arnold.

Students agree that teamwork is one of the main aspects of being successful in First LEGO League.



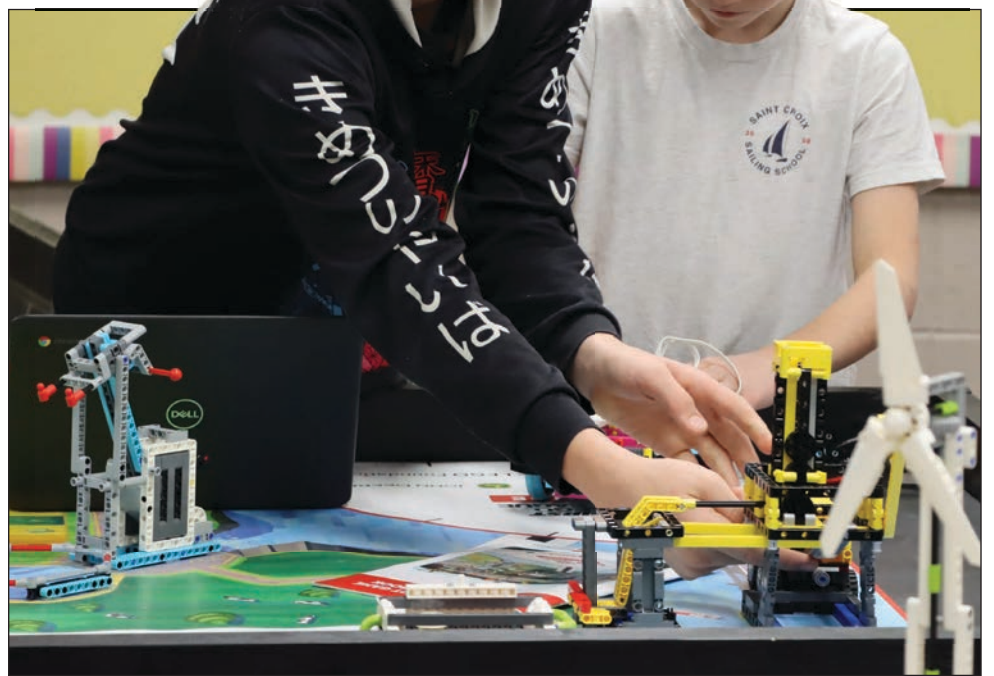
DESIGNING A ROBOT

Dean Logan works hard to construct a robot made of LEGOs during the First LEGO League meeting at Central Lyon Dec. 12. Students learn about engineering, problem solving, teamwork and more through this program. (Photo/Dominique Kooiker)

"My favorite thing about being in robotics is that I get to hang out with people I normally wouldn't hang out with. I get to know people who I maybe wouldn't have even hung out with otherwise," said Joanna Lewis, sixth grader.

"I really like that we have to work as a team to get anything done. If we don't work together, our project won't come together," said Josie McMahon, another sixth-grade member of LEGO League.

Although Central Lyon offered LEGO League last year, the students involved did not get to compete in any competitions due to supply chain issues slowing the delivery of their robot-building kits. The Central Lyon First LEGO League teams will take part in a formal competition for the first time this year. The regional competition is Saturday, Jan. 21, in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The competition starts with a session in which the teams have their robots complete assigned tasks to get the most points they possibly can.



WORKING THROUGH THE CODE

Isiah De Wit and Nicolas Hamlin work through some of their robot's coding during the First LEGO League meeting at Central Lyon Dec. 12. At their regional competition in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Saturday, Jan. 21, the teams will need to be able to tell the judges how they designed their robots, the code they wrote and more. (Photo/Dominique Kooiker)



TESTING THEIR ROBOTS

Brody Hartter and Joanna Lewis test their LEGO robots to make sure the robots are able to complete their assigned tasks. Each team designs its own robot and writes the robot's code. The Central Lyon teams will compete in the regional competition in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Jan. 21. (Photo/Dominique Kooiker)

"Then the kids will break off into their teams into classrooms where judges will ask them questions. The students have about a half an hour where they will describe their robot and how they made the

robot with different arms and present the code they used for the robot. Then the students talk about their innovation report. Each team has researched a separate topic within this year's theme: engineering en-

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NEWS BRIEFS

Public Information Meeting

The city of Doon postponed a public information meeting regarding plans for the new community center to Wednesday, Jan. 4 at 7 p.m. in the city offices.

Blood Drive

Central Lyon will host a Community Blood Bank blood drive Wednesday, Jan. 11 from 7:30-11 a.m. and 12:30-3:30 p.m. To sign up for a donation appointment, go to www.signupgenius.com.

4-H/FFA Beef Weigh Ins

All Lyon County 4-H or FFA members who plan to exhibit certain beef projects at the Lyon County Fair are required to weigh in their animals Saturday, Jan. 14 from 8:30-10 a.m. at Wynia Cattle Farm, 2960 160th St., Rock Rapids.



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Passion for helping veterans leads to new way of serving

After 25 years of military service, Larchwood resident is new director of Lyon County Veterans' Affairs office

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Not many can relate to the experiences of military service people and veterans the same as other military service people and veterans can. For Ned Hodgson of Larchwood, his 25 years of military service, personal experiences and passion for helping others has led him to the role of director of Lyon County Veterans' Affairs.

Having only been in the position a few short months, Hodgson said he is still learning, but is ready to help any veteran who comes in. "It's really a passion of mine," he said.

Hodgson originally enlisted in the Sheldon Army National Guard unit when he was 17 years old. After graduating from West Lyon High School, he went to college at Wayne State University in Nebraska, transferring to the unit there. "I did my initial enlistment, I got out and got into my law enforcement career," Hodgson explained.

After working in law enforcement a few years, Hodgson learned that the unit of some of his former service mates was standing up and going to Iraq. "So, what did I do? I enlisted back in, in 2003," he said. Hodgson was deployed to Iraq in 2007. "We did convoy escorts up and down the roads of Iraq for almost a year. I saw a lot

Iowa farmland values hit all-time high despite inflation, interest concerns

One year after skyrocketing 29 percent, the average value of an acre of Iowa farmland jumped another 17 percent, or \$1,660, to \$11,411 per acre. The nominal value of an acre of farmland is again higher this year than at any point since Iowa State University began surveying values in 1941. When adjusting for inflation, the 2022 average value surpasses the previous inflation-adjusted record value set in 2013 for the first time.

Farmland values in Iowa have increased more than 15 percent in a year a handful of times since 1941, most notably in 2011, when values rose 32.5 percent, and last year, when values rose 29 percent.

While inflation was a major factor that drove the increase last year, Wendong Zhang, an associate professor of economics and faculty affiliate of Center for Agricultural and Rural Development at Iowa State University, said that it did not play as much of a factor as commodity prices, limited land supply, and low

interest rates through summer 2022 did this year. Zhang, who is responsible for conducting the annual survey, said that inflation rates this year are similar to those from last year, but the Federal Reserve has used aggressive rate hikes since this summer to curb the problem. "The Federal Reserve seems to be determined to keep raising interest rates until they get a firm control on inflation. This is a tricky balance because larger and quicker interest rate hikes run the risk of slowing down the economy, potentially to a recession," Zhang said. While he noted that higher interest rates put downward pressure on the land market, the effects typically don't show up in land prices for one or two years.

While the Federal Reserve has been raising interest rates, Zhang said that 81% of Iowa farmland is fully paid for, so the higher interest rates don't always affect farmers' land purchasing decisions. This is especially true when high inflation makes the real interest rates

