

## Summer Robotics Camp for Middle School Students Held at STCC

Kamari Long, age 14, had thought of robots as tall, walking metal machines until he learned to build a one-foot-high robot in the summer robotics camp at Springfield Technical Community College. “These can be more useful than big robots,” he said. “They could even be used in Iraq to find and detonate IEDs.”



Kamari was one of eleven Springfield middle school students participating in the free two-week camp offered in July by STCC’s electrical/robotics technology department.

This was the second year of the summer camp, according to Dean of Engineering Technologies Adrienne Smith, and she plans to continue it. “In order for kids to envision a career in a science, technology, engineering, or math field, they have to be exposed to it. Everyone knows what a doctor or a lawyer does, but what does an engineer do? If the students aren’t attracted to it, that’s OK, but they need to see it; it’s more food for thought, for their future.”

Eleven-year-old Ashleigh Hutchinson said, “I never thought I’d be able to build a robot by myself, but actually it was pretty easy. We built trebuchets (medieval catapults) and then took them apart to build the robots. I’d like to go back to medieval times, like with castles, and take a robot with me – a bigger one. That would be useful.”

Math is Ashleigh’s favorite subject – “It’s one of those things you can love and hate at the same time” - and now she’s thinking about going into engineering in robotics, “because I really like challenging things.” She’s going to St. Michael’s Academy in September, and wishes “more of the kids from my class had come.”



Smith said that the sponsors for the camp again this year included the Hampden County Regional Employment Board and the Black Men of Greater Springfield. The REB also sponsored activities this past year at the Springfield Boys and Girls Club; and the Black Men of Greater Springfield “really helped us out this summer, providing funding for meals, and transporting the boys from the Carew Street club to the campus.” Smith located girls for the camp through local connections and had to turn away some students who she hopes will be able to attend next year,

Helen Lalone, a lab technician in the electrical engineering technology department at STCC, who ran the camp with student assistants Natalie Soares and Jeff Smith, explained that the summer program included career exploration, with the students researching the necessary education for 3 careers of their choice, the cost of related education, and the average salary in those fields. They also learned some math and physics while building the robots. She said the campers did three “builds” -- the trebuchet, a pneumatic hurler which they wired to operate, and a heavy duty chassis wired to a servo motor. “These are state-of-the-art robots,” she said. They’re used in competitions and also in classes, at the high school and college level.”

Lalone added that the students organized an exhibition game, to show their parents what they'd accomplished. On the last day of camp, the students and instructors went to a state park to enjoy swimming, fishing, games, nature trails, and a cookout.