

A Positive Outlook

Young Minds Leading Nevada's STEM Future



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**APPLIED
ANALYSIS**

Last month, more than 20,000 young robotics enthusiasts from 42 countries converged on St. Louis for the FIRST World Robotics Championships. Among them was a group of students from Cimarron-Memorial High School known as Team 987. The team, whose nickname is the High Rollers, has developed into one of the top high school robotics teams in the world. A year ago, the High Rollers made it to the world finals before finishing in second place; and earlier this year, they won regional competitions in Los Angeles, and in their own backyard, here in Las Vegas.

The High Rollers didn't win this year's world championship, but they brought home the coveted Chairman's Award, the highest honor given out at the event. This award honors the team that best represents a model for other teams to emulate, and embodies the purpose and goals of FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology). It was well-deserved recognition for a program that started as an extracurricular club 15 years ago in a small school storage room with two mentors and 10 eager students. The fledgling robotics team has come a long way since then by tapping into the curiosity of young minds and helping them cultivate

skills in engineering and computer coding.

Today, the program has progressed into a full-fledged academic course, and as Team 987 expanded, so did its reach throughout the community. Team members helped establish FIRST Nevada and regional competitions, started workshops and camps for younger students, and helped develop a robotics curriculum that is currently used at 21 elementary, middle and high schools across Nevada. The High Rollers have traveled overseas to share knowledge and camaraderie with international students. They have also worked diligently to recruit girls into the program. Today, 15 of the 32 team members are female, a notable and important achievement considering the traditionally male-dominated STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) industries.

These initiatives, both on campus and off, have helped send numerous Nevada students off to college and into careers in STEM-related fields. That success attracted the attention of state officials who provided \$750,000 in grant monies to create a new Manufacturing Technology Academy at Cimarron-Memorial. When it opens this fall, the magnet program will serve as a training ground for students entering various STEM-related fields and prepare them to step into positions with high-tech companies, like Tesla and Faraday Future, which are central to Nevada's economic diversification plan.

Education and workforce development are perhaps the two most important pieces to the state's economic strategy, especially when it comes to high-tech and STEM-related industries. Our state and local economic development agencies can offer many types of incentives to attract companies in these desirable sectors, but without a pool of potential workers to hire from, companies will be reluctant to relocate. The young men and women of Team 987 are proving to the world that Nevada is home to some of the brightest young minds on the planet, and if given the right opportunities and instruction, they can compete with anyone, anywhere. They also inspire younger generations by exposing them to robotics, engineering and other STEM specialties, creating a "virtuous" cycle that will elevate Nevada, both educationally and economically, for many future generations.