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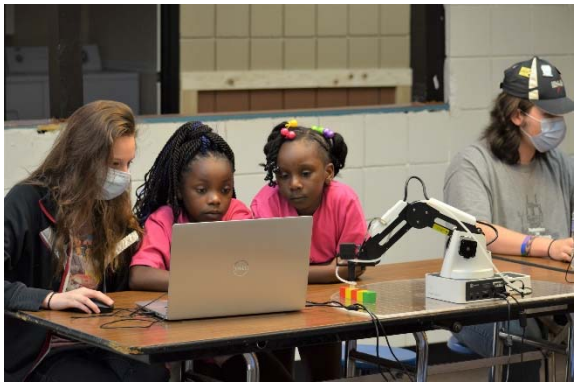
Camp Merges Robotics and Manufacturing to Prepare Indiana Youth for Future Workforce

IN-MaC and Greater Lafayette Commerce partnership provides programming to challenge perceptions and prepare K-8 students for next generation manufacturing

WEST LAFAYETTE, IN – The **Indiana Next Generation Manufacturing Competitiveness Center** (IN-MaC) has partnered with the Greater Lafayette Commerce (GLC) to provide innovative curriculum for a robotics summer camp serving children in the Wabash Heartland Innovation Network (WHIN) region.

The robotics camp (created and developed by GLC), now in its third year, provides a blend of technical and soft skills to prepare K-8 students for anticipated future workforce needs in manufacturing and robotics. Purdue University students, through IN-MaC, develop innovative programming that is exciting and unexpected. Industry partners like Subaru of Indiana Automotive, Inc., Caterpillar, Wabash National, Kirby Risk, Polymer Science, and Jordan Manufacturing provide instruction, activities, and real-world perspectives.



Students program the DOBOT Magician Lite, a multi-functional lightweight intelligent robotic arm, to learn how artificial intelligence and mechanics work.

“Students love the opportunity to create activities that challenge students’ perceptions of manufacturing and allow those students to imagine a future where they are a successful part of our local workforce,” said Dr. Greg Strimel, assistant professor of engineering/technology teacher education in Purdue Polytechnic. “From coding to robotics, students are learning essential skills and understanding how those skills factor into our local and global economy.”

This year’s robotics camp had roughly 150 total students across four weekly sessions, one in Frankfort and Tippecanoe County, and two in White County. Hosted at local YMCA’s, the camps featured stations in electric circuitry, 3D design and printing, DOBOT, Autodesk Tinkercad, and miniature robotic forklifts. Students appreciated the variety of activities and typically found areas they excelled in and enjoyed.

Students build a LEGO Mindstorm robot and program it to deliver supplies and materials through a supply chain they have mapped.

Many people do not understand all of the opportunities available in manufacturing and how high-tech those options are," said Kara Webb, workforce development director at GLC. "Our main goal with these camps is to spark a passion and ignite a fire within these kids to see something they can do, enjoy doing, and do within their community."

“The 27 curriculum modules are being utilized at existing IN-MaC Design and Innovation Studios™, which are housed in elementary, middle schools, and industry locations throughout Indiana, said Sascha Harrell, director of education and workforce at IN-MaC. “The activities are structured with the intent to educate and inspire the emerging workforce, spark creative thinking, and develop the essential skill sets critical for future careers in manufacturing.”

IN-MaC and Dr. Strimel also use the opportunities to evaluate further impact, skill development, and perception changes throughout this process to better prepare students for a future in Industry 4.0.

Planning has begun for the 2021 robotics camps. Information about the camps is available at www.GreaterLafayetteCommerce.com or by contacting Kara Webb at kwebb@greaterlafayettecommerce.com.

To learn more about IN-MaC’s Design and Innovation Studios™, contact Sascha Harrell at smharrel@purdue.edu.

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About IN-MaC:
IN-MaC provides programs and services to enhance Indiana's present and future workforce's talents and capabilities by facilitating connections between educators and industry to catalyze the formation of near-term and long-term skills in a highly accessible manner across Indiana. IN-MaC supports a variety of STEM-type, skilled trades, degree (associates and undergraduate), and certificate programs.

IN-MaC leverages its resources, networks, and partnerships with industry, local communities, educators, and interested stakeholders to provide a variety of formal courses and informal activities that embolden pathways to meet the present and future talent needs manufacturing workforce.

About Greater Lafayette Commerce:
Greater Lafayette Commerce is a non-profit membership organization supported by local businesses, industries, and governments. Its mission is to advance economic and community prosperity for a superior quality of life.