Report of the 2004 Harrisonburg First Lego League Regional Tournament

On Saturday, Nov. 13th, 2004, JMU hosted a regional tournament for the First Lego League (FLL), the first tournament ever held in the Shenandoah Valley. The goal of FLL is to promote interest in science and technology among children through robotics competitions. Eight teams from the Shenandoah Valley region took part in the competition, each team including up to 10 children of ages 9-14. Each team competed in four events, including robot performance, robot design, project presentation, and teamwork. The focal point of the tournament was the robot performance event, in which teams put their Lego robots to work carrying out various missions on a competition field. Three of the teams who competed will go on to state competition on Dec. 4th in Blacksburg.

The tournament planning team (identified below) began preparation for the tournament in the spring of 2004. Our goals included encouraging the development of new teams, finding financial support for the project, finding a suitable venue, and developing a volunteer base to staff the tournament.

We were fortunate to receive over $2500 of funding, from several sources (see below) to support our activities. A large part of this fund was used to provide “scholarships” to new teams, which paid half of their start-up costs. The remaining funds were used to obtain supplies and equipment for the tournament and food for volunteers. Most of the equipment purchased is durable and will be used in future tournaments, so that future tournaments will cost much less to organize.

Through a combination of visits to local events, newspaper and radio publicity, email to professional lists, and personal contacts, we were successful in encouraging formation of several new FLL teams in the region. We are also encouraged by further interest among teachers and parents who are very eager to form teams in 2005. Many of those who visited the tournament this year told us of their plans to form teams for 2005. Additional publicity resulting from the tournament has made more people aware of FLL and of JMU's participation in the event.

We were also fortunate to have access to the JMU College of Integrated Science and Technology buildings for the tournament. This space was an excellent choice for the first tournament. Coaches and parents who attended the tournament were very complimentary of the comfort and amenities the buildings offered. The large auditorium served as the robot performance arena, and with the help of the Technical Services staff, we were able to project the tournament on the large screen in the auditorium as well as streaming it over the Internet.

The tournament staff was formed by graduate students and faculty from Education and ISAT, other JMU staff members, ROTC students, and employees of Merck and Co. We were fortunate to have a committed and capable group of over 30 volunteers who made the tournament run as smooth as clockwork.

We have already begun on planning for the 2005 tournament, which we hope will be bigger and better. Our goal is to grow to 12-15 teams in size next year, through continued recruiting and publicity. Tentative date for the tournament is Nov 12th, 2005.

Ralph F. Grove, Jr.
Nov 17, 2004
Budget:

Income

Merck & Co., Inc. $1,000
Shenandoah Valley Technology Council $975
JMU Technology Alumni Group $650
Total $2625

Expense

Supplies & Equipment $920
Food (for volunteers) $265
Direct grants to teams $1425
Total $2610

Planning Committee

- Ralph Grove, JMU College of ISAT Director
- Elizabeth Knight, JMU Fundraising Coordinator
- Patricia May, Merck & Co., Inc. Media Coordinator
- Steve Purcell, JMU College of Education Assistant Director

About FLL:

- First Lego League, USA: http://www.firstlegoleague.org

*FIRST* designs accessible, innovative programs to build self-confidence, knowledge and life skills while motivating young people to pursue opportunities in science, technology and engineering. *FIRST* inspires in young people, their schools and communities an appreciation of science and technology, and how mastering these can enrich the lives of all.

The *FIRST LEGO League* (FLL), considered the "little league" of the *FIRST Robotics Competition*, is the result of a partnership between *FIRST* and the *LEGO Company*. FLL extends the *FIRST* concept of inspiring and celebrating science and technology to children aged 9 through 14, using real-world context and hands-on experimentation.

With the help of *LEGO® MINDSTORMS™ Robotics Invention System™* technology, young participants can build a robot and compete in a friendly, *FIRST*-style robotics event specially designed for their age group. Using *LEGO* bricks and other elements such as sensors, motors, and gears, teams gain hands-on experience in engineering and computer programming principles as they construct and program their unique robot inventions.