

West Carolina Tel

JULY/AUGUST 2017

CONNECTED

LITTLE RIVER BLUEWAY

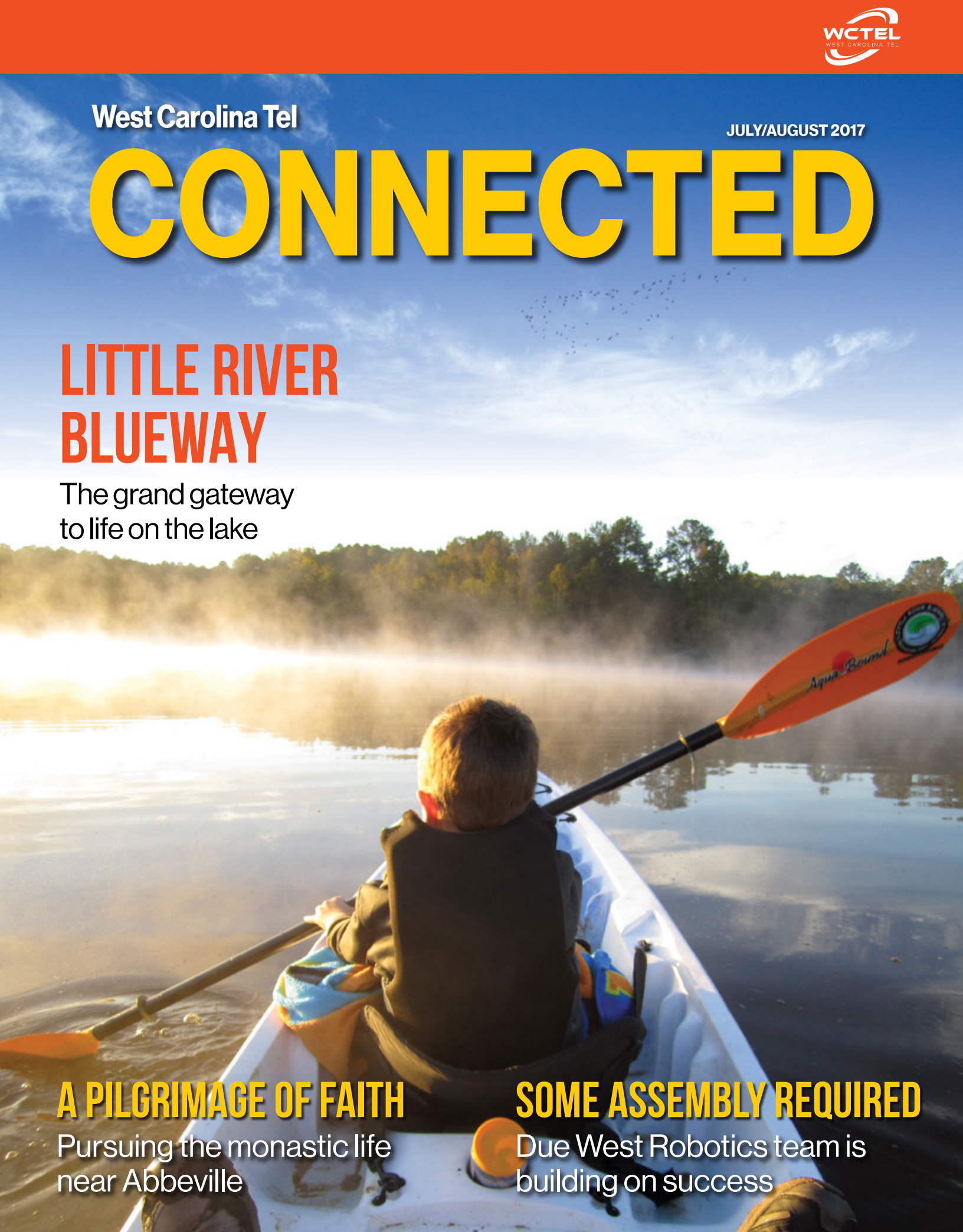
The grand gateway
to life on the lake

A PILGRIMAGE OF FAITH

Pursuing the monastic life
near Abbeville

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

Due West Robotics team is
building on success



Helping our neighbors in Greenwood

In communities like ours, neighbors help each other. This was true in the small town where I lived in North Dakota, and I've found it to be true in the years since I've moved to South Carolina. WCTEL is expanding to help our neighbors, and I'd like to tell you about our project in Greenwood.



JEFF WILSON
Chief Executive Officer

As you know, WCTEL is a cooperative that started more than 60 years ago by local farmers and businessmen to connect the residents of Abbeville and McCormick counties to the outside world. Those of us in those counties — and in communities like Starr and Iva where WCTEL expanded over the years — have been very fortunate to enjoy a state-of-the-art communications network for decades, whether the technology of the era meant party lines, private lines, fax machines or fiber optics.

Unfortunately, not everyone has access to such a network. In America today, we have what many have called a “digital divide” between communities that have broadband access and those that don't. Communities without broadband are at risk of suffering economically and educationally, and their residents'

overall quality of life is hindered as well. Smart communities realize this risk and try to do what the WCTEL founders did all those decades ago: They work together to bring in a world-class communications network.

Two years ago, we began offering our industry-leading gigabit service across the Savannah River in Columbia County, Georgia. Certain communities in Columbia County had approached us about running our fiber network into Georgia so that they could access the same broadband speeds WCTEL members enjoy. We did our research, received the permits, and created a subsidiary named WCFIBER to bring broadband to those underserved areas.

Now, our neighbors here in South Carolina have reached out to us for help in Greenwood, and we're proud to lend a hand. Starting with an apartment complex in April, WCTEL crews and contractors have been working hard to connect Greenwood customers — with plans to build more this year.

While this network gives local residents the connections they need to live, work and play, adding customers in Greenwood and Columbia County also helps WCTEL's bottom line. The board of directors and I are charged with making sure WCTEL is financially viable so we can continue to connect our members in the future. While I'm proud to say WCTEL is doing well on our balance sheet, the board and I have identified Columbia County and Greenwood as important opportunities for growth.

If you would like more details on WCTEL's fiber build in Greenwood, please visit gigupgreenwood.com.

It's important to know that WCTEL's home will always be Abbeville and McCormick counties, as well as Starr and Iva. Our top priority is making sure our members are taken care of, and we have engineered this expansion so that the new customers in Greenwood will pay for the investment in their communities. Your bill will not increase to pay for these new builds. At this time, there are no plans to give Greenwood customers membership rights like our longtime customers in Abbeville and McCormick enjoy, like voting for board members or having access to capital credits.

I am proud to be a part of the company you trust to provide you with that important connection to the rest of the world, and I'm proud to be a part of a company willing to do the right thing and help our neighbors enjoy those same connections. ☺

West Carolina Tel

CONNECTED

JULY/AUGUST 2017

VOL. 5, NO. 4

The West Carolina Tel Connected is a bimonthly newsletter published by West Carolina Telephone, © 2017. It is distributed without charge to all members/owners of the cooperative.



is a member-owned cooperative dedicated to delivering advanced telecommunications technology to the people of Abbeville, Anderson and McCormick counties.

West Carolina Telephone
233 Highway 28 Bypass
Abbeville, SC 29620
Telephone: 864-446-2111
www.WCTEL.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Westley “Wes” McAllister, President
North McCormick, Area 8

Stanley H. Keaton, Vice-President
Antreville/Lowndesville, Area 5

Jane U. Stone, Secretary
Donalds, Area 3

Talmadge R. Bussey
South McCormick, Area 9

L. Ned McGill
Starr, Area 1

John Michael Thomas
Iva, Area 2

James Robert Hester
Calhoun Falls, Area 6

William “Billy” Bauman
Abbeville, Area 7

Lee W. Logan
Due West, Area 4

Produced for West Carolina Tel by:

WORDSOUTH
A CONTENT MARKETING COMPANY

On the Cover:



Little River Blueway founder Kirk Smith takes his son Alex out on a tandem kayak for a morning paddle on the smooth lake. See story Page 8.

Herron named to state's Broadband Hall of Fame

BY JEN CALHOUN

West Carolina Rural Telephone Cooperative's former chief executive officer and general manager, David J. Herron, was recently admitted into the South Carolina Telecommunications and Broadband Hall of Fame.

Herron has worked more than 43 years in the rural telecommunications industry; his career includes time with the telephone division of the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Electrification Administration and 26 years at WCTEL.

At the age of 24, Herron became the youngest field engineer deployed by REA, which is now the Rural Utilities Service.

After leaving REA, he came to WCTEL to oversee the cooperative's growth and rapid technological improvements for its membership of more than 15,000 subscribers.

Under Herron's leadership, the cooperative expanded from multiparty phone lines in 1988 to fiber optic services throughout the coverage region. Herron also oversaw implementation of the cooperative's expanded services, which include internet, digital entertainment, cellular service and more.

He retired from the cooperative on March 31, 2013.

As a member of the National Board of



David Herron recounts his experiences at WCTEL and in the telecommunications industry upon his induction into the South Carolina Telecommunications and Broadband Hall of Fame.

Directors of NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, he helped build the board's reputation as an industry leader and a strong force in shaping services to rural America. He also provided leadership and worked on numerous local, state and national telephone industry activities. He has served as Region 2 director of the NTCA board and received the NTCA Life Achievement Manager Award in 2012.

Herron was born in Kingsport, Tennessee, in 1948, and he married Pamela Terrell Herron in 1992. He has four stepsons: Casey Smith, David Smith, Matthew Smith and Jacob Smith.

He served in numerous community

civic organizations and was named the South Carolina Ambassador for Economic Development in 1997 by Gov. David Beasley. Herron served as a board member of Bank of Abbeville, Abbeville Optimist Club and as a volunteer at Abbeville Country Club. He has enjoyed fishing, golfing, farming, spending time with family and traveling.

Aside from his accomplishments, Herron is also known for valuing the individuals he has worked with and for possessing a great sense of humor and a genuine desire to see others recognized more than himself. ☺



Welcome to the WCTEL family!

We're excited to announce that we have two new employees at WCTEL. Dee Morton, left, and Brittani Nicholson are here to serve as account services representatives.

WILD BLUE YONDER

Little River Blueway a hidden gem for outdoor enthusiasts



BY JEN CALHOUN

About 10 years ago, Heather McNally and her parents headed south from Fairfax County, Virginia. When they stumbled upon the Little River Blueway Outdoor Adventure Area, they knew they'd found home.



The area is within the Sumter National Forest at the convergence of Little River and Lake Thurmond. It includes Baker Creek State Park, Hickory Knob State Resort Park and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' lands and parks.

The blueway offers 51 miles of trails for kayaking and paddleboarding, 136 miles of hiking and biking trails, and numerous spots for camping, boating and fishing. The area also offers a 50-mile scenic drive for cars and motorcycles. And the Forks Area Trail System (FATS) is designated as an Epic Trail by the International Mountain Biking Association. Other options for adventure include golfing, skeet shooting and historic sites.

"It's a beautiful, beautiful place to call home," says McNally, a mother of two girls, ages 12 and 8, and program director at McCormick Arts Council. "It's pretty easy to go and grab the dogs on the leash and jump into the car and go



Jimmie Smith's Earth Connection Outfitters has plenty of gear for hitting the lake, including popular stand-up paddleboards.

enjoy the trails. You can't go in a direction that isn't providing an awesome place for an afternoon hike or a morning cup of tea."

More and more people are agreeing with her, too, says Kirk Smith, chief operating officer of Savannah Lakes Village, a 4,000-acre, master-planned lakefront community along Lake Thurmond.

People from across the country have

responded to the appeal of the Little River Blueway, as well as the golf course and other more traditional amenities Savannah Lakes Village has to offer, such as a bowling alley, tennis courts, and indoor and outdoor swimming pools.

“Over the last two years, 178 families have moved here,” Smith says. “We’re also experiencing a lot of growth in the community.”

In fact, his father, Jimmie Smith, a former schoolteacher, now runs Earth Connection Outfitters. The business is located on his wife, Ginnie’s, family’s property on U.S. Highway 378 West.

The business rents and sells outdoor equipment, such as kayaks and paddleboards. The company also offers paddleboarding lessons. Jimmie Smith says bass tournaments and national and international biking competitions are common events in the region.

Jimmie Smith is on the board of the local Rails to Trails initiative, which repurposes abandoned train tracks into bike lanes and hiking paths.

“We just like to help people get out and enjoy what God’s given us,” he says.

And as life speeds up, more people are growing interested in finding that help, Kirk Smith says. “There’s such a shift in our society,” he explains. “People want to be able to disconnect from the commute in our metro cities and disconnect from our smart devices and actually enjoy time and recreation and the healthy benefits they offer.”

They also want the authentic experiences the region provides.



Before hitting the water, Jimmy Smith conducts a safety briefing with a womens group that rented kayaks for the day.

“You have to be authentic,” he says. “You have to provide something and be true to what you are. It’s not about hype. It’s not about who has the largest marketing budget. It’s about the lifestyle that you offer. Then, you’re either a match for people who want that lifestyle or you aren’t. But we have to be true to what we are and offer those authentic experiences.”

At the same time, however, the fiber optic infrastructure available in the region has been a big draw to those who run technology-based businesses and consulting firms out of their home offices in McCormick, Kirk Smith says.

“So, you can be unconnected outdoors and come right back and be as connected into that pipeline as you want to be,” he says. “They have greater bandwidth and fewer operating expenses as a result.”

The lure, however, continues to be the Little River Blueway, which gives boaters, paddleboarders and self-described “lazy kayakers” like McNally a great way to explore nature and the heritage sites along the trails.

One heritage site is the Huguenot Worship Site, a stone marker designating a former church built by French Huguenots in the 1760s. Huguenots were Protestants who followed Calvinist doctrine.

Another heritage site is the John de la Howe School, a farm school for poor and orphaned children founded in 1797. The school, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, sits on 1,200 acres overlooking Lake Thurmond.

Whatever the interest, the Little River Blueway will likely have something for everyone.

“The girls and I go out and explore little areas,” says McNally, who adds that one of her favorite kayaking trips with her daughters is to a rookery not far from their home. “It’s tremendous, and both my daughters have always had a high interest in science, especially natural science.”

Together, the family discovered 11 nests and 14 active birds at the rookery, as well as blue heron shells. At other spots, they’ve found osprey nests, turtles and bald eagles. McNally says she’s not much for catching fish herself, but the waters are a draw for anglers.

McNally says the real pleasure, though, is in spending time with her family in the outdoors, making discoveries and appreciating the natural world and the resources given to them, while also having those “aha” moments.

“We are able to go out at every season of the year and find nature and have great discoveries,” she says. “It’s a wonderful thing.”



An eager kayaker takes in a sunrise on the lake.

Constructed between 2006 and 2008, the Chapel Panagia Soumela is the worship center for the Paracletos Greek Orthodox Monastery.



Serving faithfully from a distance

BY MATT LEDGER

Finding religion off Gin House Road might seem unlikely. But hidden among the trees and rural farms on that winding two-lane is an extraordinary example of faith — the Paracletos Greek Orthodox Monastery.

The monastery is part of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Atlanta, which has served five states for more than 30 years. When it was time to open a new monastery, leaders turned to Greece for someone to guide the effort.

As a result, Greek-born Gerontisa Pavlina, who had often traveled to the United States, was chosen as the new mother

superior, and she helped bring the religious order to the Abbeville area in 2004.

As an abbess in Athens, Greece, she had trained younger nuns. Along with two other sisters, she relocated and found the ideal property outside of Abbeville.

She selected the location for the Chapel of Pangaea Soumela based on proximity to the diocese's summer camp in Salem,

where she camped the prior year.

"We found out early on that the people here are very good," Abbess Pavlina says. "They welcomed us from the very first time we came here."

DAILY RITUALS

In 2005, Sister Mariam and Sister Alexia moved into the small rural home with Mother Pavlina. The home sits on 123 acres of pastoral property outside of town.

The nuns maintain the monastery, dining hall, guest house and workshop. They also tend to the crops, growing much of their own food.

"We have our own animals and try to be self-sufficient," Sister Mariam says.

The three women start each day at 4 a.m. with the first prayer session lasting three hours.

"Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy for me, the sinner," Abbess Pavlina prays in English with only a hint of her Greek accent. "We are praying for ourselves and for all people. This is the purpose of our lives."

After breakfast, the women begin their various jobs with additional prayer sessions at noon, 4 p.m. and 8 p.m.

SHARING THE MESSAGE

While the basics of monastic life haven't changed since the time of Christ, a few modern amenities have helped the monastery provide for their people and raise money for their effort.

A small workshop is among the additions to the property, which allows the women a creative outlet.

"Now we are making religious artwork, which is the primary way of supporting our monastic life," Abbess Pavlina says. "Most of the people coming here are curious to see the church because it is so different." 📞

Paracletos Greek Orthodox Monastery is open to visitors daily from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 4-7 p.m. Only baptized Orthodox Christians can attend the weekly Divine Liturgy. To find out more, call 864-348-7545 or visit greekorthodoxmonastery.org.

Small-town team of young engineers takes on the world

Due West Robotics competes in international championships

BY JEN CALHOUN

When Due West Robotics launched its youth engineering team in 2012, they never expected to compete in the world championships only a few years later. But that's just what happened.

In April, a nine-member team of 9- to 14-year-olds from Due West Robotics joined 108 teams — out of 24,000 teams worldwide — to compete in the 2017 FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Championships in Houston.

Members of the Due West Robotics team, known as The Tornado of Ideas, were eligible to compete after winning the state championship in January, Due West Mayor Charles Angel says.

Angel is also president of Due West Robotics, a nonprofit Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) organization offering workshops and classes to students from ages 6 to 18.

Using Lego Mindstorms kits, the FIRST Lego League teams were challenged to design, build and program robots using STEM concepts to match a theme chosen by competition organizers. The students also worked as a team to develop solutions to real-world problems and to present their inventions to a panel of judges.

TOOLS FOR THE FUTURE

The skills in engineering, presentation and teamwork are important for a child's ability to learn and grow, says Angel, who helped found Due West Robotics after his son, Ethan, competed in the FIRST events with three other children.

"It was just too good an opportunity for just our kids, and we wanted to provide

Team members practiced for the international tournament, where they met students from around the globe.



more opportunities for other kids in our community," he says.

This year's FIRST theme was "animal allies," which challenged the teams to find innovative solutions to agricultural problems farmers face when dealing with animals. The Tornado of Ideas came up with a product called the Goat Guard, which targeted the common problem of goats getting their horns stuck in fences.

The Tornado of Ideas interviewed farmers to define the problem, developed a device to address the situation, tested it on real goats, and then refined it based on feedback from the farmers.

Developing the device, however, was just a small part of the international competition, Angel says. The team was also required to build a robot that could accomplish missions autonomously and to make a presentation to engineers to show how and why the team built and designed the robot. They were also asked to make a presentation showing how they worked as a team, how they developed their team identity and how they were able to be effective.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The Tornado of Ideas team didn't bring home the big prize, but they were nominated for five separate awards, including



Aviation leaders from Boeing visit with the two teams from Due West Robotics, The Tornado of Ideas, left, and the Midnight Sparks, right. Both were ranked in the top 10 teams for South Carolina during this past school year.

Innovative Solutions for their invention, Teamwork, Mechanical Design, Programming, and Strategy and Innovation.

They also learned to say "hello" in all the languages of the teams in the competition.

"At one point, they came up to me and said, 'Hey Mr. Charles, those kids from China? They're actually pretty cool,'" Angel says with a laugh. "I think it was just a great experience to meet other kids from around the world. Just getting all that experience will make a big difference." 🗨️

For more information about getting involved with Due West Robotics, contact Charles Angel at charles.angel@duewestrobotics.org.



233 Highway 28 Bypass
Abbeville, SC 29620

Presort STD
US Postage PAID
Permit #21
Freeport OH

BE THE Hero

Upgrade your Internet today & get a \$50 VISA gift card.

Better streaming,
e-learning, gaming,
connecting.



Some restrictions apply. One-year agreement. Offer expires 8-31-17.
Speeds may not be available in all areas. Residential only.

(864) 446-2111 | wctel.com

