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Youths get into gear at robotics camp

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ENDS SEPTEMBER 7

BRANDON - Brittany Blake and Corri Gonzalez dashed from competition track to computer screen, tweaking and testing, tweaking and testing.

In a week, the two 11-year-olds went from having no clues about what makes a robot work to programming one and entering it in a competition against their fellow campers.

The Robotics Camp at Hillsborough Community College, sponsored by the Florida Advanced Technological Education Center, HCC and the University of South Florida, was designed to teach middle school students how robotics is used in manufacturing, specifically in the Sunshine State.

"You can use them to make DVDs, streaming video or even to pick oranges," said Brittany, a student at Mann Middle School in Brandon.

Corri, of Tampa, took control of the computer on the final day of camp to adjust the settings for the program, so their robot would make the right turns at the right time.

"Their final challenge includes every program they learned all week on how to instruct the robot," camp instructor Allan Dyer said. "They have to teach the robot each particular task."

Much of the focus of the camp was designed to steer students toward high-paying, high-skill careers, through a new program the technological center has designed for an engineering technology degree.

Hillsborough and Pinellas counties are among the top five in the state for the number of manufacturing businesses, according to the technological center.

Yvette C. Hammett

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