Primrose School's robotic prize benefits Safe Animal Shelter

School finished third in "Ready, Set, Robotics" competition

By Kyla Woodard
For Clay Today

FLEMING ISLAND – Young "explorers" at the Primrose School of Fleming Island put their skills and bright minds to the test to accomplish something big.

Participating in Primrose Schools' second-annual 'Ready, Set, Robotics!' challenge, the students placed third in the prestigious competition, eating 50 other Primrose schools to win $1,000 that they donated to the charity of their choice – Safe Animal Shelter.

"I couldn't be more proud of all the hard work that they put in. And, just they're ideas that they come with at such a young age. I'm like, 'Wow, I would have never thought about something like that,'" said Primrose Director Mandy Ross.

For two weeks during the summer, nearly 30 first-through-sixth graders worked in teams to learn how to code and engineer four rescue missions with Dash the robot. Working together, the students aimed to effectively move the robot across an increasingly complex mission grid and around obstacles.

A video of each team's rescue mission was submitted for evaluation.

The 'Ready, Set, Robotics!' program began last year as a part of the school's Summer Adventure Club. Ross said the program aims to empower students to think creatively and solve problems within and outside of the classroom walls.

"They're learning how to work in groups. And, they're learning how to problem solve with each other amongst a range of age groups, trial and error," said Ross.

The students participated in the competition for the first time last year, and Ross said it was quite intimidating for them. However, this year, the stakes were high. And, Ross said, the explorers came out of the gate swinging and ready to put their skills to work.

"This year … they came out ready to win. They knew what the expectations were. I'd say they were way more into it this year than last year, just because we knew what to expect," Ross said.

Teacher Robin Dunigan witnessed the students firsthand and said it was a sight. From helping the students get necessary supplies to answering questions, Dunigan said her love for the new program is unmatched.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Primrose School of Fleming Island students turned their skills and attention to robotics to finish third place at the "Ready, Set, Robotics" competition. The group then donated their $1,000 prize to Safe Animal Shelter.

"It's amazing to watch them. It really is," said Dunigan.

Dunigan said watching the students in their element has influenced her way of thinking in many ways.

"I'm learning through them, also. They teach me many things that I didn't know," Dunigan said. When choosing where to donate their winnings, Ross said Safe Animal Shelter was a relatively easy choice. Dunigan recalled one poignant memory where one student made an emotional plea to pick the shelter.

"His statement was, 'The animals give so much joy to people, that it would be really nice to give something back to them.' And … there was no argument about where the money was going to," Dunigan said.

For the future, Ross said she hopes to continue creating a space in the school for students to learn, build, and positively interact with each other.

"I couldn't be more proud. To see the growth from last year's challenge and how they took it to this year, it's leaps and bounds better. Just seeing them build those friendships … has been huge for us," Ross said.