

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Suffolk Robotics Team Advances to State Championship

Kalamoo Community Outreach's Robo Diggers Headed to James Madison University in January

SUFFOLK, VA — Kalamoo Community Outreach is proud to announce that one of its FIRST LEGO League robotics teams, the **Robo Diggers**, has qualified to compete at the Virginia/DC FIRST LEGO League State Championship on **January 10, 2026**, at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

The achievement comes after a strong showing at the Newport News FIRST LEGO League Challenge, where Kalamoo fielded three teams to compete among 26 teams from across the region. Notably, Kalamoo's teams were the **only representatives from Suffolk, VA** at the competition—bringing visibility and pride to our city's growing STEAM education community.

"Kalamoo has brought LEGO Robotics with FIRST LEGO League to the youth of Suffolk," said **Carrie Matsko**, coach and mentor of the Robo Diggers. "Teams have built robots and coded them for specific challenges, laying the groundwork for future opportunities in advanced engineering fields. It is thrilling to see kids on fire for STEM programs—this is the future."

"I am so proud of Team Robo Diggers!" Matsko continued. "They excelled on Saturday, bringing their robotic 'A' game to the matches and impressing the judges with their invention, '**Scrub A Dub**'—a mobile cleaning and sorting machine designed for use on active archaeological dig sites to streamline archaeologist workflow."

The team developed their innovative concept after a hands-on experience with the **Fairfield Foundation** in Gloucester, Virginia. Working alongside archaeologist **Thane Harpole** at Fairfield Plantation, the Robo Diggers rolled up their sleeves and got to work—digging up artifacts and learning firsthand about the challenges archaeologists face today. This real-world experience put them in a unique position to refine their "Scrub A Dub" concept.

The team's innovation caught the attention of competition judges in a significant way. "After listening to the presentation on Saturday, one of the judges recommended applying for a patent for the design!" said Matsko. "So who knows? Perhaps Robo Diggers will have a patent pending soon... stay tuned!"

"We are all excited to continue on to the FLL State Competition at James Madison University, representing Kalamoo, STEM youth, and the great city of Suffolk," Matsko added.

"We are incredibly proud of all three of our teams," said Cusi, CEO and Founder of Kalamoo Community Outreach. "These young people have worked so hard, learning robotics, coding, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. Having the Robo Diggers advance to State is a testament to their dedication and the power of hands-on STEAM education in our community."

FIRST LEGO League is an international robotics program that engages students in grades 4-8 in hands-on STEM learning through robot design, coding, and an innovation project addressing real-

world challenges. Teams are judged on their robot performance, innovation project, and demonstration of FIRST Core Values including teamwork, discovery, and inclusion.

Kalamoo's robotics programs are made possible through the generosity of community partners. The organization extends special thanks to the **North Suffolk Rotary Club** for their monetary contribution supporting the teams, and to **Suffolk Christian Church**, which hosts Kalamoo's weekly LEGO Club sessions and provides a welcoming space for students to learn and grow.

Community Support Needed

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to keeping programs free for families, Kalamoo Community Outreach is seeking sponsors to help cover travel expenses for the State Championship. The trip to JMU will require approximately \$2,000–\$2,500 to cover transportation, lodging, meals, and registration for the team's three members, their coach, and a Kalamoo representative.

"We believe every child deserves access to quality STEAM education, regardless of their family's financial situation," added Cusi. "Sponsors who invest in our teams are investing in Suffolk's future—helping us develop the next generation of engineers, scientists, and innovators right here in our community."

Businesses and individuals interested in sponsoring the team's State Championship journey can contact Kalamoo Community Outreach at cusi@kalamoo.org or visit www.kalamoo.org.

About Kalamoo Community Outreach

Kalamoo Community Outreach is a Suffolk-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with the mission to champion Suffolk's transformation into a regional STEAM hub by delivering innovative educational programming that connects diverse communities. Through mobile LEGO Education programs, FIRST robotics teams, and community events, Kalamoo currently serves 90+ students weekly and operates four FIRST robotics teams. The organization's tagline, "Where Learning Connects Communities," reflects its commitment to bringing hands-on STEAM education directly to families across Suffolk.

