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Newton Robotics Hosts VIPs at the Fair

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BRANCHVILLE, NJ – The Newton High School FIRST robotics team hosted several special guests at their new home at the Sussex County Fair Grounds. Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno accepted Aperature's invitation to stop by and talk about STEM education and promoting the status of academic teams to the varsity level.

Guadagno was joined by New Jersey Senator Steve Oroho and US Congressman Scott Garrett. Stella Dunn President of the Newton Board of Education and Jim Carr Executive Director of FIRST Mid Atlantic Robotics were on hand to greet Guadagno along with Coach Jim Hofmann and Assistant Coach Darleen Nelson, Tina and Anthony Miragliotta from team sponsor Mira Plastics and the Apertures students.

The students introduced themselves and explained their role on the team to Guadagno. Liam Oakes the team's Business and Public Relations Leader told the Lt Governor of

their hopes of getting legislative support to require districts to give all students the same opportunities they enjoy; varsity status for their academic team.

He explained there was currently a bill, A3879 sponsored by Troy Singelton, Jack Ciattarelli and Craig Coughlin “that requires schools to adopts a policy allowing students in grades nine through 12 who participate in certain interscholastic extracurricular activities to earn varsity letter.” Further he asked if she would support the bill and asked what they could do to lend their voices to the cause.

Guadagno asked Oroho to join them and discuss the legislative process of getting a bill all the way from conception to be signed into law. Guadagno encouraged the student to write to the representative on the committee sponsoring the bill and to encourage students from the committee members’ home districts to write as well.

Guadagno, Oroho and Garrett suggested the students also come to Trenton to testify when the bill is on the agenda.

This bill had been introduced and referred to the Assembly Education Committee and had a second reading. The companion bill is S3879 sponsored by Christopher Bateman and Diane Allen. It was introduced and referred to the Senate Education Committee.

Oroho spoke with the students about the competition he had attended in Mount Olive. He was impressed by the" enthusiasm of the of everyone, including the fans. It was incredible,” he said.

The team presented the Lt Governor with a model of their robot created on the 3D printer. They also gave her a team t-shirt.

Before leaving Guadagno spoke with some of the girls on the team. They spoke about

the team mentoring program for younger students. Guadagno encouraged them to continue. She said, "Something happens with girls in STEM. It is pretty evenly split 50-50 girls and boys all the way thought school then it drops off to about 25 percent of STEM workforce."

She went on to say she "doesn't like to play the girl card" but that is something that needs attention.

Garrett, who spoke with the team at the fair last year, said he continued to support STEM education because there is a need for people to fill STEM jobs.

"I've been with FIRST for 12 years and I've seen kids grow up, go to college and are now practicing engineers," said Carr. "They get excited about engineering; they are not afraid of math. They love it.

"Colleges are actively recruiting FIRST kids," he continued. "They know how to work on a team and under pressure."

Freeholder Richard Voden and his wife Faith, along with Alison Littell McHose also stopped by the Aperature team's new home. Speaking about the Newton program, Richard Voden said, "The coach does an amazing job with these kids." This sentiment was echoed by many members of the team and the representatives of sponsors Mira Plastics and the Picatinny Arsenal STEM program.

Guadagno reminded the students to follow up with the legislators about the proposed bills and encouraged them to even bring additional 3D models like the one they made for her.

"This will be on display in my office," said the Lt Governor. "with other things that have been made in New Jersey."