



NSBE FIRE

at the

White House

By Donna M. Owens

At an age when many of their peers are learning to drive, 16-year-old friends Jasmyn Logan and Nia'mani Robinson are busy learning how to build rockets.

"I have always loved science. It's one of my favorite subjects," says Jasmyn, a junior at Central High School in Capitol Heights, Md. "I thought that rockets would be fun."

Jasmyn and Nia'mani aren't novices, however. They began to delve into rocketry in the 9th grade. Last year, they joined forces with another member of their NSBE Jr. chapter, Rebecca Chapin-Ridgely, to form "Team Rocket Power." They became one of 300 groups who qualified to be considered for the finals of the Team America Rocketry Challenge (TARC), which was held this past May 10 in The Plains, Va.

The national rocket-building contest, sponsored by the Aerospace Industries Association, the National Association of Rocketry and industry partners, gives some 5,000 middle school and high school students across the country the opportunity to design, build and launch model rockets.

Later in May, Team Rocket Power soared even higher. Jasmyn,



Team Rocket Power on the White House lawn with Bill Nye "the Science Guy"

Nia'mani and Rebecca were among more than 100 students from 30 states who were invited to participate in the White House Science Fair in Washington, D.C.

"I was excited," says Nia'mani. "I'd never been to the White House before."

SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT

Getting to the president's home took years of dedication. Team Rocket Power sacrificed their free time after school and on weekends to develop, construct and test their bright purple rocket for the TARC competition. Their goal was to launch the missile to an altitude of about 750 feet and then return its "payload," an egg, safely to the ground.

"The girls have worked very hard," says Kamili Jackson, an engineer at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland, who leads the Pre-College Initiative for the Greenbelt Space Professionals Chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers. "It's kinda cool to watch them grow, mature and develop. That's been nice to see."

Team Rocket Power is part of a NSBE Jr. chapter called Future Innovative Rising Engineers, or FIRE for short. The chapter is based in Glenn Dale, Md. It now has about 30 members in grades 6–12, who take part in activities that expose them to careers in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

"The students have built robots and other projects, but Kamili really wanted them to try rocketry," says Kevin Johnson, a member of the National Association of Rocketry and one of the adults who mentors the rocketry team. "We're here to provide structure and framework. But the students are the ones who do the work. And when they build something successfully, there's a sense of achievement."

Countless hours were spent perfecting the rocket says Chapin-Ridgely, who is now 18 and a freshman at the University of Maryland, College Park.

"It was challenging at times, but a learning experience," she says.

FOCUS ON GIRLS

Although the trio didn't advance to the TARC finals, their efforts didn't go unnoticed. Later that month, they were called to Washington, D.C., for the White House



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Science Fair. This annual event, which has been held since 2010, celebrates the winners of STEM competitions for young people across the U.S. This year's fair also included a specific focus on girls and women who are excelling in STEM and who are inspiring the next generation with their work.

President Barack Obama delivered remarks at the fair to an audience of students, science educators, elected officials and business leaders. He stressed how important STEM education is to America's economic future.

"When students excel in math and science, they're laying the groundwork

(left to right) Nia'mani Robinson, Jasmyn Logan and Rebecca Chapin-Ridgely of FIRE NSBE Jr., with Charles Bolden, the administrator of NASA, at the White House Science Fair

for helping America compete for the jobs and industries of the future," said the president, who expressed his pride in those taking part in the science fair.

The commander in chief also walked around to view some of the exhibits, which ranged from cancer research to new inventions. Team Rocket Power set up their rockets on the White House lawn, and because the president didn't make it outside, they didn't get a chance to meet him. However, the girls shook hands with Bill Nye "the Science Guy" and Charles Bolden, the administrator of NASA. The young ladies agreed that the entire experience was wonderful.

Jasmyn and Nia'mani are looking forward to applying their expertise in rocketry when they get to college. Right now, they haven't decided on a career path, but Jasmyn is leaning toward the medical field — "maybe a medical engineer," she says. Nia'mani once wanted to be an architect, but "now my favorite class is chemistry," she says.

Either way, it's safe to assume the girls will aim high and rocket to the top. ■

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