

Clearwater Citizen article: Kids learn to compete in Robofest competition

Kids learn to compete in Robofest competition

By ALEXANDRA CALDWELL

DUNEDIN - Four boys dance around a table with a decorated pillowcase on a stick as they shout "KAMELZ! We are the KAMELZ." A robot on the table dances with them to "In the Jungle." It's the team's final meeting in Dunedin before they enter their robot in the first regional Robofest Competition in Safety Har-

Robofest is a robotics competition for middle school and high school students to help the kids become excited about science, engineering, technology and math. Teams design, build and program robots to compete various competitions, including Exhibition, Game Competition and the RoboFashion and Dance Show. There will be 15 teams at the regional competition Saturday, March 21, 1 to 5 p.m., at the Safety Harbor Community Center, 650 S. Ninth Ave. It is free and open to the public.

"I think it's fun that you can design stuff that no one has ever designed before, and you use computer software to program it, and I like doing that kind of stuff," said Michael Weigley, 12, of Safety Harbor.

Weigley makes up the "M" of the KAMELZ, which was derived from the team members' names: Kameron Madley, 13, of Oklsmar - he is the Madley, 13, of Olosmar – he is the "KA", Weigley, Niles Loughlin, 14, of Dunsedin provides an "EL"; and Zach Jacquillard, 13, of Dunedin adds the "Z." The group met for a few weeks at Patent Attorney Michael J. Colitz Jr.'s office in Dunedin, who served as the sam's coach. The boys designed and built their robot and programmed computer software to tell the robot how they wanted it to move.

The KAMELZ team's robot will compete in the RoboFashion and Dance Show against three other teams. The students must use their creativity and imaginations to come up with their own choreography and synchronize a skit with the robot. said Alaba, director and organizer for the event. The kids act out a skit while the robot dances, she said.

There are eight teams entered in the Junior Game, which is a techni-

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Photo by ALEXANDRA CALDWELL

From left, Kameron Madley, Michael Weigley, Niles Loughlin, and Zach Jacquillard run through a dress rehearsal of their skit for the Robofest Competition to take place March 21.

ROBOTS, from page 1

cal empetition, Alaba said. cal competition, Autho such First the teams must draw a stage, but they will not know the size or shape the judges choose until during the com-petition. Teams are disquast Red If they do not draw anything in 30 minutes. If the rebot leaves the paper, it is a 50 percent deduction. These they was the part of the second and the beautiful properties. who pass that test go on to the second game, where robots are teamed against each other and here to fight to occupy a certain area for three seconds or posts the other robot off the

posts the other robot off the table. Adals said.

There are three learns regi-sered in Joine Ephdiston, to which students make up their own propert, Alabas said. They one the Leigh robot fit to demonstrate a goal, such as a used too feeding the cat. she said Al teams also will have to make if the feeding the cat. she said Al teams also will have no make judges to trained pos-tions about the worth, whence and recoveranting of these ro-

normal means and search and propagations and propagations of their zo-bots, she said.

Studenth in the 15 teams are from all over the region, in-challing Domardin, Crearwater, Safety Harbor, Indian Rocks. Beach, North Redington Seach, Selinar Large, St. Pe-tersburg, Brandon and Ocala. At the KAMELZ's final term

meeting. Collic brought in a secret weapon: 23-year-old Stephen Kowski, originally from Clearwater who now is utudying to corn his master's degree is electrical engineering from the University of South Carolina. Roweld has worked with robots for 10 years and wanted to show the boys that robotts and engineering can be fun and is side on impor-

the fundamental and appearance to get people exposed to get people exposed because we are drastically undermanned for the future."

Kowski said. "As far as a week!

giobal economy, we are not potting out nearly esough engineers to compete with any of these countries, and it is going to hit in the next five to 10 years. People are going to hit in the next five to 10 years. People and realize, oh man, we're not preducting anything in preventing anything in preventing anything in preventing anything in preventing anything anymore. All these boomers who were inopfied by NASA and the project of going to the mous are now retiring.

Tolobottes is a good way to expose kids to engineering. Rousels seed, because it hits on all kinds of aspects of eagmeeting. Computer acience.

mechanical engineering, elecmechanical engineering, etc. rical engineering and creativi-ty. Kowski said the field needs kids like the KAMELZ team to become interested in engineer-ing because the United States now has to fly in people from overseas to fill all the job posi-tions that buby bosiners are

"There's just a lack of peo-ple in the engineering field." Kowski said: "It's bord, it's in-Nowske seek: "It's bord, it's fu-teristive, it's math-henry, and not a lot of people like to do it, so we have to get people to in-deristand that this is a fun thing you can enjoy doing, rist

> Michael Weigley, left, and Kameron Madley finish decorating their team's flag for the Robulest Competition to take place March

21. Right: The team KAMELZ robot KAMELZ cobot described forces down the numery during a diress rehearsal for their entry in the Robofest Competition.

Proof to ALENACES.

just inflows math and gried-ing out numbers?
Alaba agreed. She is the owner of the Computer Learn-ing Center in Clearwater and said her good is to target fourth- and lifth graders to fourth- and Bith-graders to show them muth, science and computers can be fun. So he, the beye in KAMELZ are still interested. Weigley solid he would like to be a mechanical engineer. Lengthin soul he wants to go into engineering or science, and Jacquillard and bindley like computers, Jacquillard wants to program valvo gones, and Madby likes

computer software. Or he

wants to be a congressmen.

The two hardest things about 9tobolesti are programming and working together with people, trying to get the right ideas," Madley said. "Semetimes if you want an idea and another person doesn't you have to create a new idea."

People who are interested in

partiripating in pest year's Robolest may call Alaba and get on a list to receive nations and updates about the event csemps. Call 447-3067.







Dunedin Beacon article: Kids learn, excel in Robofest

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Kids learn, excel in Robofest

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They were absolutely terrific, "Ashes cost." New were trying to send them to the World competition, Alaba them to the World competition, Alaba in the Junior Came, which is a technical competition, Alaba.

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said. First the teams these a shape, but they did not know this size or shape the juriges choose until during the competition. Teams were disqualified if they did not deav ampthing in 20 missions. If the robot leaves the paper, is a 50 percent deduction. Those who passed that has writ to the socreal game, where robots teamed up against each other to fight to occupy a certain sizes for these seconds or practite the other robot off the table. Alshin sout. The St. Petershing team New Xirenas won this event. The side on this seam were Mechael Gentrity and Drew Davies.

These were three teams registered in Junior Exhibition, in which stodents made up their own project. Nation said. They used the Lego relate let the demonstrate a goal, such as a natio like peeding the cut, the said. All frams also had to answer judges' declarical questions should be

to answer judges' technical questions about the math, science and programming of their robots, site said. John Dowd Kappeler of team Beick Boulders of Land O'Lakes wen first piece in this

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Beacon, March 27, 2009

Photo sources of Education of the Industrial Competition on March 21.

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Take math, add some plastic toys, make robot

By JIM HARRINGTON

CLEARWATER - Legos, those little interlocking plastic bricks that kids used to build cars, log cabins have a great deal to do with math, geometry and science.

They're now robots in the making.

That's what Emma Alaba has been teaching students who come to her computer learning business. And assisting her with the process is Steve Nies, who operates a Web site to help Alaba's clients learn about the interaction of algebra, a little physics and robotics.

The idea behind the partnership is to give students a hands-on feel for the concepts behind such fuzzy concepts like algebra and other higher math subjects. They apply the knowledge they've learned to a moving object, like a robot.

Nies shows the students a robot and tells them they will eventually make Star Wars robot R2-D2 walk.

But first, they have to learn how ratios and other math concepts fit into the equation. At www.robotportal.net, registered users can poke around in a safe, kid friendly atmosphere where they will find other robot-enthusiasts as well as robot related Web sites.

Using Mindstorms, a robotics-teaching program put out by Lego, Alaba and Nies hope to turn on students to the future.

The outlook for robotics appears promising. A Google news search using the word "robots" brings up a host of links highlighting the technology behind such robotic-related articles including robotic hands and their implications for medicine, as well as an automobile manufacturers plans to use "humanoids" to perform menial tasks and communicate with each other.

Even Microsoft's Bill Gates recently made his pitch for robotics. In the January issue of "Scientific American," Gates writes that science is in the verge of a new industry using new technologies. The problem is that it's a "fragmented industry" with but a handful of universally accepted principles to guide it. Gates likens the current trend in robotics to the advent of computers more than 30 years ago.

That trend, as Nies sees it, should be grasped by today's students. The collaboration between Nies and Alaba is a mix of Web sites, science and math instruction, hands-on learning with computers and, of course, the plastic building blocks. The team will bring their program to a local recreation center in the summer.

Alaba especially hopes her enthusiasm will click with girls, who notoriously fall behind in science and math when they reach adolescence.

That passion for computers seems to rub off on parents and kids, said Cynthia Yevich, the principal of Blessed Sacrament School in Seminole.

The hands-on component of Alaba's and Nies' program is important. It works on the students in a curious way.

"Kids are learning but having a good time at the same time," said Yevich. Too often, youths go home and pick up the remote control.

Maybe instead of picking up the TV controller, some kids will pick up a Roomba, another robotic-inspired innovation that combines house-cleaning chores with a "Jetson" quality. The small, round disk-shaped vacuum cleaner has won over many a homeowner, both men and women, who love the machine's inherent usefulness as a house-hold tool, but who are just as thrilled with the "wow" factor of its robotics.

Robotics will eventually. Nies hopes, be a mainstay of the Internet generation's culture.

"There's a creativity to its uniqueness."

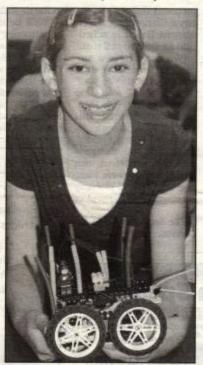


Photo courtesy of EMMA ALABA Ciara Myers learns the essentials of robotics, including the math and science behind computer-controlled mechanical devices.