



Joe Larese/The Journal News

Family and team members watch as Alex Bhandari-Young, left, and Teddy Lee of the Edgemont Explorers run their team's robot during yesterday's competition at Pace University in Pleasantville.

PLEASANTVILLE

Young engineers match wits

At Pace competition, students try to build the best Lego robot

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The Journal News

Hundreds of children showcased their multicolored Lego robots yesterday at the second annual Lower Hudson FIRST Lego League tournament at Pace University in Pleasantville.

Yorktown and Scarsdale groups were among the winners as 24 teams from throughout the tri-state area competed, including 10 from Westchester and Putnam counties.

The tournament challenged students to perform specific tasks using telephone-size Lego robots and computer technology. The tasks of this year's "No Limits" theme were geared toward helping disabled people perform everyday actions.

For example, children attempted to make their robots climb

stairs or open a locked gate that was arranged on a surface roughly the size of a pingpong table.

In addition to the tasks, teams were also graded on teamwork and a 10-minute research presentation on equal access.

Pace's School of Computer Science and Information Systems sponsored the event. For Associate Dean Bernice J. Houle, the tournament helps children to realize they can have fun, be creative and learn at the same time.

"Hopefully this gets them excited about technology so they stay in their math and science classes and maybe even continue with it professionally," she said. "It helps middle school kids see that you can use technology to solve problems."

As a member of the Techno Girls, the Westchester-Putnam Girl Scouts team, Elise Mazurak said the tournament inspired her to pursue her passions for Legos and problem-solving. Her goal is to become an engineer.

"I know my friends might say, 'Oh! You're such a geek!' but I

Tournament awards

- Director's Award, best overall performance: L³ Robot Rulers, Lockport, N.Y.
- Teamwork, first place: MO-BRAKS, Scarsdale
- Team Spirit, first place: Inferno Dragons, Mildred E. Strang Middle School, Yorktown
- Research Presentation, first place: Seymour Cyberteks, Seymour Smith Elementary, Pine Plains, N.Y.
- Programming, first place: Atomic RoboMonkeys, Conklin, N.Y.
- Robust Design, first place: RoboDevils, Brick, N.J.

don't care what they say. I'm having a blast," said Mazurak, 14, of Bedford. "It's hard work, but the product is awesome."

Members of the Fox Lane Middle School team agreed that this was a tough project. The team met

weekly since November, then worked every day — during lunch periods and after school — for two weeks to perfect their robot. For Rachel Joseph, 13, working with her classmates was the best part.

"It's fun to have tons of different ideas come together," said Joseph, of Mount Kisco. "I love the experience of working together to build one robot, even though we might lose."

Although Fox Lane's robot didn't win any awards, the team came in second-place for their team spirit. The L³ Robot Rulers of Lockport, N.Y., took home the top Director's Award for overall best performance.

"I know it's Super Bowl Sunday," said Joseph Morreale, provost of Pace University, "but if we spent as much money on science as we do on sports, we'd be way ahead of the game."

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