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Staten Island Advance (NY)

SI Tech students vie in robotics competition
- Student Christina Fenn
They want to enter a national event - but need a corporate sponsor to do so

EDDIE D'ANNA Advance staff writer
Published: August 11, 1999

It was an engineering contest that Staten Island Technical High School students dubbed "The Scrambler."

Each of three teams designed and built a rolling wooden vehicle out of a plank of wood, and attached a large Grade-A egg to the front of it.

Then, in something out of a crash-test dummy commercial, the vehicles were propelled directly toward a large X taped on the wall. The students hoped their brake systems and mathematical calculations would not result in a mess.

The egg that stopped closest to the wall without being smashed won.

"Three eggs were broken so far today," said Christina Fenn, a member of the PFunk All-Stars team.

The Scrambler was one of three projects presented in the gymnasium yesterday by students of the New Dorp school's Summer Robotics Program.

The program, now in its fifth year, runs for six weeks, with students coming in Monday through Friday mornings for five hours.

All Staten Island Tech students are eligible to join the program.

For the 24 students who participated in the course, it was time well spent, said their teacher, Steven Raile. Especially since they have aspirations of entering a similar competition called the F.I.R.S.T. Robotics Competition.

F.I.R.S.T. (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) is a nonprofit organization based in Manchester, N.H., whose goal is to generate an interest in science and engineering among youth.

Hundreds of schools enter the group's national science and technology competition each year and the finals are shown on ESPN.

Raile said his class was preparing for the robotics competition. He

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explained the work is meant to provide the students with a background in different areas of engineering.

As the teacher stood amidst the cheering students watching their projects do battle, school Principal Eleanor O'Connor watched from the sidelines.

"This is a hands-on course designed to put their learning into practice," she said. "They are taking what they learned and are applying it to real life."

According to Mrs. O'Connor, the program was proof that all learning need not be tedious and confine students to a desk.

And the students were just as pleased with the program.

"I am definitely doing this again," exclaimed Miss Fenn, a newcomer to the program who will begin her junior year in the fall. "I like engineering, and this expands on everything that you do: Designing, planning, building and testing."

Along with the Scrambler, the students also engineered systems for three other contests.

The "Propeller Propulsion" contest asked students to construct a motor-powered plane that would have to outfly its peers, while the "Tower Building" required students to construct a wooden tower that would have to hold approximately 50 pounds.

Finally, the "Naked Egg Drop" competition picked up where the Scrambler left off, asking students to build a structure that would protect an egg dropped from heights beginning at two meters, then increasing at various intervals.

While the students seemed to be enjoying the festivities, some were looking forward to a greater challenge.

"I am getting excited about the F.I.R.S.T. Robotics Competition," said Matthew Kudrick, who will be entering his senior year.

But the students may not get the chance to strut their stuff; the school doesn't have enough money to send them to the competition unless a corporate sponsor can be found, said Mrs. O'Connor.

The idea of the competition has been high on their wish list since the students saw a regional robotics competition in Philadelphia last year.

In order to make this a reality, says Raile, the students have already helped draft a letter asking various businesses to donate money or a facility to work in.

The fee to enter is $4,000, not to mention shipping, traveling, lodging expenses and the cost of materials.

"We will need about $20,000 to go," estimated Raile.

Students Stephen Milone, left, James Lee, J.T. Quadrino and **Joshua Blackman** prepare to launch their "Scrambler" vehicle.

Infobox
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