

# Christian Central Academy Lego team wins regional competition, heads for Atlanta

by ELIZABETH TAUFA  
Reporter

Robots may seem like a hobby out of science fiction, even in today's technological world. But for the FIRST team at Christian Central Academy, robotics skills are now bragging rights.

Recently, the team won a chance to compete against 104 teams from 38 countries in an international competition of robotics in Atlanta.

"Our goal is to use competition to get kids interested in science and math," said FIRST team coach and Christian Central parent Ross Bowman. "We're stealing a concept from sports for the kids to be interested in academics."

The team is made up of pupils in fifth through eighth grade. They meet once a week for two hours.

What they have constructed is a regulation, self-automated robot, which they must program to accomplish various tasks.

During competition, nine tasks are given to each team. The tasks

include moving objects to a specific area on the table and triggering reactions to accomplish a goal, such as activating an elevator.

The team is given two and a half minutes to accomplish all nine tasks. Members are given three chances, and the best time they achieve is the one they are judged on.

"What they're doing is hands-on science," Bowman said. "There's no lesson plan. They are given a task, and they have to figure out how to accomplish it."

Bowman noted that the team's adult coaches, who in addition to Bowman are Sue Wendt and Mark Vincett, are simply guides for the pupils, rather than teachers there to give answers and grades.

He also noted that the problem-solving system of learning is one that doesn't always seem like work to the pupils, a sentiment they echoed.

"Considering I get a robot, it's cool," said Luke Lattiner, a sixth-grade member of the FIRST team.

But the competition isn't just



The Christian Central Academy FIRST team will accompany their robot to Atlanta to compete with teams from all over the world. Here, Lauren Torrissi, left, Zoe Bowman and Jesse Kaufman practice.

about robotics.

The pupils will also be graded on a research project that they had to find a creative way to present to the judges. The presentation that the team has chosen was on stain-resistant fabrics, and members presented it with an infomercial.

They must also present the de-

sign of their robot and explain why they designed it the way that they did.

Finally they are judged on their teamwork, both during the presentations and while working with their robot in accomplishing the tasks.

"One of the biggest things is that they have to talk to these adults

that they don't know," Bowman said. He noted that explaining the process and design theories behind the robot are good preparation for the technological world, should the pupils decide to pursue it.

Other members of the team included Jesse Kaufman, eighth grade; Laurel Vincett, seventh grade; Daniel Wigglesworth and Lian Bunny, sixth grade; and Zoe Bowman and Lauren Torrissi, fifth grade.

At 1 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 17, the FIRST team will host a mock competition, the CCA Lego Roundup, against a team from Franklinville and two teams from Lockport.

That morning, from 8 to 10 a.m., the FIRST team will hold a fundraiser at Applebee's on Transit Road.

The fundraiser will be a pancake breakfast. Pupils will be present to seat attendees and to help serve breakfast. The cost is \$5 per ticket, which can be purchased at the door or by calling Wendt at 791-8521.

e-mail: etaufa@beenews.com

## Williamsville Schools explains Special Education Committee

The Committee on Special Education in the Williamsville School District will make a presentation explaining what the CSE is about and how it works to benefit each student.

"Understanding the CSE Process" will begin with dinner at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 24, at the district office, 105 Casey Road, East Amherst. A business meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m., followed by the presentation at 6:45 p.m.

Presenters are Sue Barlow, director of training at the Parent Network of Western New York; Theresa Drum, trainer for Parent Network of WNY; Beth Foels, coordinator of special education at Williamsville; and Surinder Arora, coordinator of special education at Williamsville. Parents of special education students will also be represented.

CSE is designed to address children with differing abilities and challenges, individual needs and interests. It exists to respond to each student's personal growth and development in a constructive, methodical manner.

The event will also highlight the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and allow attendees to interact with the presenters.

To sign up, contact Dave Whalen at 565-9338 or e-mail whalen\_s@msn.com.

### School News

The Williamsville Association of Retired Teachers donated \$300 to the Meals on Wheels Foundation of Buffalo and Erie County. As part of the New York State Retired Teachers Association Western Zone, the donation helped reach a total of \$7,800.

Williamsville North Club Hockey Team's varsity and junior varsity players visited Women and Children's Hospital and delivered gifts, room by room, to the children in the hematology/oncology unit. The gifts were donated by both of the teams players, friends and family members.

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