



Home > News > Local News

Teamwork and technology showcased at annual competition

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Posted: Sunday, January 15, 2017 1:10 am

By VINCENT OSUNA, Staff Writer | 0 comments

Posted on Jan 15, 2017
 by Vincent Osuna

Most students think building a robot is impossible — until they actually try it.

Hundreds of robotics students from local middle and high schools achieved the impossible by not only building robots but competing with them in the 19th annual Imperial Valley MESA Robotics Competition.

Teamwork and technology showcased at annual competition

Local high school students control their team robots in the 19th annual Imperial Valley MESA Robotics Competition at Kennedy Middle School in El Centro on Saturday afternoon. VINCENT OSUNA PHOTO

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Held on Saturday afternoon at Kennedy Middle School, the annual competition showcased teamwork and technology among students after months of hard work and preparation.

"It was tough, but we were tougher," said Southwest High freshman student Arlene Castillo on competing in her first ever robotics competition Saturday, which Castillo and her team placed just above last place in their division.

"We didn't win but we learned from that," commented Castillo, who believes her and her team of four classmates learned to work harder and plan to bounce

back for next year's competition.

Castillo did have her school to be proud of as all teams who placed in the top three spots of the competition were from Southwest.

Placing first overall was team Senioritis, composed of Southwest senior students Brandon Vizcarra, Sergio Beltran, Madi Lopez, Steven Velarde, Francisco Flores Canto and Jacob Moreno, with a total score of 99.

Second was team Russian Ryba, made of freshman Southwest students Rodian Voldman, Beau Erro, Eduardo Guerrero, Henry Cox, Andre Aleman and Oscar Chavez with a total score of 94.5.

Placing in third with a total score of 93.7 was team Cancelled, consisting of Southwest students Bryan Cancel, John Flores, Michael Flores, Jose Vidal, Victor Diaz and Anthony Ontiveros.

Leading the middle school division in this year's competition was The Seige, a team of Holtville students Arath Zamora, Jonathan Villagomez, Isidro Garcia, Nick Villegas, Isay Arce and Raul Panales, who placed first with an overall score of 246.5.

In second place was The Flame, made of Westmorland Middle School students Celeste McCoy, Janelle Garcia, Ilissa Perez and Audrey Meza, with an overall score of 240.

Team Blaze Fighters, consisting of Enrique Camarena Middle School students Sebastian Ramirez, Aime Fuentes, Rodrigo Espinoza and Eric Leon, placed third in the competition with an overall score of 233.8.

In September, students are given difficult and specific tasks to complete in order to prepare for the competition as well as a real life scenario which their robot must complete.

This year's scenario was each robot must be able to help firefighters put out fires.

Middle school robotic teams used Legos to create their own unique robots, which were controlled with laptops.

To create their robots, high school teams had to assemble 1,000 pieces, program it to an Xbox controller using a VEX Robotics design system and create a throwing mechanism using recyclable material.

Although both school levels had a different robot design, IV Mesa program director Jeanette Espino said the competition was created to be equally challenging for both levels.

Along with the robot itself, a PowerPoint and scaled drawing was required from each team.

The Kennedy gym was covered with three mats simulating burning buildings and street roads.

Teams first controlled their robot to pick up a bucket and move it towards a safety cone representing a fire hydrant. Then using a custom throwing mechanism, the robots were controlled to pick up and launch golf balls, which represented water, at the cardboard buildings.

The higher the ball was accurately thrown at the buildings resulted in more points.

Coordination between teams was necessary as four robots competed at a time on each mat.

With approximately 40 robots in the middle school division and 36 robots in the high school division competing Saturday, Espino said the annual event truly gives students an opportunity to build their teamwork and problem solving skills.

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