

Hatboro-Horsham Robotics Club Makes Engineering Look Easy

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By Kimberly Flanders Staff Writer



Rick Kintzel / Staff Photographer

If you think R2-D2 from “Star Wars” is smart, you haven’t met RumbleBee, the Hatboro-Horsham High School robotics club’s latest creation that picks up and throws basketballs aggressively across a room.

RumbleBee was designed, built and finished in six weeks, and is one of many robots the club has created in recent years.

The basketball-chucking machine with a computer for a brain made an appearance at the Hatboro-Horsham

Educational Foundation’s 25th anniversary celebration on Tuesday.

During the ceremony, the foundation honored the recipients of its Innovative Learning Grant who have made the most impact, and the robotics club was among recipients honored.

Eric Zygmunt, a member of the IT department for Hatboro-Horsham School District and the adviser of the robotics club, has been working with the club for the past five years.

“We’ve received a grant each year for the last five years, and we use the grants to buy equipment that we use to make the robots,” Zygmunt said.

According to Zygmunt, the latest grant the club received from the Educational Foundation was about \$12,800.

“We build everything out of metal. We use chain sprockets, sensors and electronics — it’s a rather expensive program to run,” Zygmunt said.

“We go to the Hatboro-Horsham Educational Foundation every year and tell them what we’d like to do that year. Every year it’s something new and different,” he added.

According to Zygmunt, the robotics club competed at two local competitions last year and qualified for the Mid-Atlantic Robotics Championship, which was held at Temple University’s Liacouras Center in Philadelphia.

In 2009, the club competed at the Robotics World Championship in Atlanta and was ranked 12th in the world.

“The kids are designing and building the robots. We don’t send anything out to be made for us. Everything you see on the robot the kids did themselves,” Zygmunt said.

“What the grant has allowed us to do is get machinery and tools so students can do everything in house. They really get the hands-on knowledge, from drawing the concept, to manufacturing it, to putting it out for competition,” he said.

The robotics club’s season does not begin until January, but students have been busy designing their newest creation that will compete with the brains and talent of RumbleBee.

“We’re currently designing a T-shirt cannon bot. It shoots T-shirts into crowds

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during football games and is designed to bring more attention to the club and add extra excitement to the football games,” said Adam Blickley, an 18-year-old senior from Hatboro who has been in the club for three years. Blickley noted that the new robot will have “swerve drive” capabilities and be able to turn while it’s traveling straight, allowing for some dangerously accurate T-shirt aim.

“The grants have allowed us to be able to get more and to achieve more,” Blickley said. Sam Perry, a 17-year-old Horsham resident and senior entering his fourth and final season with the robotics club, said the club hopes to have the new robot finished for the homecoming game. Perry noted that the funding the club has received has “help offset the costs for families involved” when it comes to competitions, which, according

to him, cost about \$5,000 for registration.

“It definitely means a lot to have funding and support. When I was a freshman, I had no idea what I wanted to do, and because of robotics I now know that I want to be an engineer and pursue science and math in the future,” Perry said.

During the Educational Foundation’s anniversary celebration, the robotics club was not the only organization honored for receiving grants.

Recipients in the categories of media and digital literacy, environmental education, student leadership and arts and culture were also recognized for their achievements.

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