

PS 21 best in toy robotics contest

BY Joyce Shelby
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

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Six months after being introduced to robotics, the kids at Public School 21 in Bedford-Stuyvesant have scored big.

They were named the top team in Brooklyn during the FIRST LEGO League robotics competition at Brooklyn Tech last month.

FIRST - For Inspiration and Recognition in Science and Technology - is a group that creates innovative ways to get youngsters interested in science, technology and engineering. And the LEGO company creates and markets the popular multicolored interlocking plastic bricks, and other toys.

"It's unusual to win a top award the first time out," said Norman Scott, a retired teacher who serves as contest liaison.

On Jan. 26, the PS 21 kids won a Team Spirit Award during the New York City FIRST LEGO League Championship, a citywide competition held at Riverbank State Park in Manhattan.

Teams from St. Clare Elementary School on Staten Island landed the competition's top honors, the Champion's Award. The school's Transformers 2 Team will represent New York City at an international competition in Atlanta.

The third-place Championship Award winner was Intermediate School 75 in Staten Island.

Brooklyn's Benjamin Banneker Academy won the Teamwork Award and Bedford Academy copped the tournament's Against All Odds Award.

During the competition, students vied to see how many tasks their robots could complete in 21/2 minutes.

The upper elementary and middle school students also made presentations on how they built and programmed their robots, and how the world could be made better through energy conservation. PS 21 ranked 32nd among the 82 teams competing.

"They were excellent," teacher and coach Carla Arnold said.

"They had only a few months of exposure to robotics and did a great job. We are very, very proud of them."

"Everyone had fun," said Andrey Ivannikov, a senior at Polytechnic University who served as PS 21's mentor. "We brought cheerleaders along and they cheered for everybody, not just our team. We had a great time."

Learning, not winning, was the most valuable part of the experience, the school's principal, Harold Anderson, said. And the exposure to building robots might have a long-term impact.

Thomas Smith, 10, programmed the PS 21 robot during the competition. "I'm thinking about becoming an engineer," he said.