



Brooklyn, Borough of Robots **Hundreds of Middle-Schoolers Compete for Robot Fame and Glory**

By Mary Frost

There's no place like Brooklyn for robots.

The gym at Polytechnic Institute of New York University (NYU-Poly) was virtually crawling with toaster-sized robo-critters this past Saturday, as hundreds of middle school students and their enthusiastic supporters gathered for the Brooklyn qualifier of the annual FIRST LEGO League robotics competition.



So many Brooklyn schools signed up to compete, there wasn't enough room for all of them at NYU-Poly. Brooklyn "has the highest participation rate among the five boroughs — in fact, so many Brooklyn schools signed up that we had to send the overflow to compete in the Staten Island and Manhattan qualifiers, which take place in the coming weeks," said Susan Hermon, FIRST Lego League (FLL) coordinator for Brooklyn.

In the end, teams from 37 Brooklyn middle schools entered the Brooklyn qualifier, where, as supporters cheered, they put the robots they have been building and programming since September through a variety of missions and gave formal presentations in front of a panel of judges from the engineering field.

This year's theme challenged the students to bioengineer solutions to physical limitations. The robots aimed to overcome problems like injuries (solution: bone repair) and genetic predispositions (solution: bionic eyes) as they navigated tabletop courses under strict time limits.

The winners of the qualifier (listed below right) will compete in the citywide FIRST Lego League competition on March 13 at the Javits Center.

One reason for the popularity of robots in Brooklyn has been the support of Polytechnic University, now NYU-Poly, over the years. This is the 11th year that NYU-Poly hosted the FIRST robotics day, and NYU-Poly graduate fellows mentor students in 18 low-income middle and high schools as part of the Central Brooklyn STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) Initiative (CBSI).

For the mentored schools, this year's FIRST bio-medical theme provided an opportunity for fellows and the teachers they support to develop classroom lessons on the science behind each challenge, teaching about the circulatory and skeletal systems, for example.

“Like FIRST, NYU-Poly recognizes how important it is to inspire students at a young age in the opportunities that a STEM education can provide,” said Vikram Kapila, NYU-Poly associate professor of mechanical engineering and lead of the CBSI NSF program. “FIRST and CBSI show young students that they will be able to change the world if they pursue a rigorous technical education. We can also demonstrate to them, through NYU-Poly's traditionally high-salary potential rankings, that engineering careers can improve life for their families.”

The initiative is a public-private partnership supported by The Black Male Donor Collaborative, the Brooklyn Community Foundation, Motorola Foundation, J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation, XEROX Foundation, NY Space Grant Consortium and Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate. The supporting graduate fellows program also receives major funding from National Science Foundation's GK-12 Fellows Program.

The founder of the FIRST competition is Dean Kamen, the entrepreneur and inventor who created the vehicle that became the Segway PT. This year's event was sponsored by Time Warner Cable's East Region/NYC, Consolidated Edison, Swiss Re and The David L. Klein, Jr. Foundation; NYU-Poly is the affiliate partner.

An event for high schoolers takes place separately.

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Winners of the FIRST LEGO League Brooklyn Qualifiers

1st Place: P.S. 11 (Mission 11)

2nd Place: Genesis Xaverian (Genesis)

3rd Place: I.S. 318 (Blood, Sweat and Gears)

Research

1st Place: UAI (Super Novas)
2nd Place: I.S. 383 (Sky Bots)
3rd Place: P.S. 58 (Bionic Boys)
4th Place P.S. 372 (Body Builders)
5th Place: P.S. 9 (Electrical Mines)

Robot Design

1st: M.S. 113 (Falcon Robotic Allstars)
2nd: Home Schoolers of Brooklyn (team name is the same)
3rd: Bedford Academy (Bedford Bots)
4th: Mott Hall Bridges Academy (same name)
5th P.S. 3 (RoboTigers)

Team Work

P.S. 5 (PS 5 LEGO Rockets)
P.S. 147 (Bot Bots Bots)
P.S. 233 (LEGO Minds)

Judges Award

P.S. 8 (8 Bots)

Performance Awards

1st: P.S. 94 Amazon Warriors
2nd: P.S.94 Master Blasters

4th: P.S. 636 (Boogie Bots)
5th: P.S. 21 (The Panthers)

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