



## Crowds Roar as Robots Compete in Brooklyn

by Mary Frost (mfrost@brooklyneagle.net), published online 01-12-2009

### LEGO Robot Competition at MetroTech

By Mary Frost  
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

METROTECH -- The cheering from the crowd reached ear-splitting levels as rival teams of hand-built robots rolled onto colorful tabletop playing fields.

"Go, go, go!" teammates and supporters yelled as chicken-sized contraptions scuttled along the tabletops, carrying out tasks like picking up a plastic animal, moving it to an enclosure, dumping it there and coming back to its starting point.

For some competitors there was triumph, for others despair -- when their robots flipped over or crashed -- at the Brooklyn finals of the New York City "FIRST" Lego League Championship competition, held Saturday at the Polytechnic Institute of NYU. But for all, it was an experience that left them high on technology and determined to build a better robot next year.

"We kicked butt!" Coach Russ Holstein enthused to his students from Williamsburg's I.S. 318, after two perfectly executed missions. The team was wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the bright red letters B, S and G -- standing for Blood, Sweat and Gears.

"Everything landed in -- I think we'll take third place," he told the Brooklyn Eagle. "If we're lucky, second. We did really well." By the end of the competition, I.S. 318 -- the Eugenio Maria de Hostos Intermediate School -- went on to take first place, the "Champion Award."

### Polytechnic Students Mentor Central Brooklyn Kids

"They learn that learning is fun, and they learn applied science," said Dr. Noel N. Kriftcher, executive director of the David Packard Center for Technology and Educational Alliances at Polytechnic.

Poly's robotics program -- AMPS/CBRI, or "Applying Mechatronics to Promote Science/ Central Brooklyn Robotics Initiative" -- is coordinated by Prof. Kriftcher, along with Vikram Kapila and Prof. Maged Iskander.

Polytechnic students mentored 13 teams that competed this year. Of the 13, six qualified to move on to the citywide finals, to be held at the Javits Center on March 7.

"It's a particularly friendly competition, where the students can demonstrate expertise and can adapt to conditions. If the robot doesn't work right away, they make minor adjustments. They also make a research and technology presentation," said Dr. Kriftcher.

"We're very excited to encourage young people to study math, science and technology -- it's great stuff," he said.

Parent Eric Kennedy said that the program was a good outlet for his son, also named Eric Kennedy, who attends P.S. 399 in East Flatbush. While the kids do learn "about mathematics and learning angles," he said that for the younger students, it was also about the fun. "They like the yelling and the screaming."

### Room for Art and Talent As Well

Park Slope's M.S. 51 is known for art and talent, with a show choir and a vocal music program, said Coach James Hoffman (wearing a beanie with a propeller on top). But 25 kids joined the robotics team anyway. "We were one of the original Lego teams; we've been doing this for seven years."

"These are our geeks," he said proudly, introducing eight members who served as the Research Squad: Annabelle White, Renon Biscaino, Brigid Connelly, Andrea Sumrall, Joaquina Terrones, Ingrid Wiemer, Gabriela Pedrero and Polly Kyle, all seventh graders.



P.S. 11 Purvis J. Behan School made it to the citywide finals in March as a wild card team  
Photos by Mary Frost

1/9

<<first <previous next> last>>

Speaking as a chorus, the girls said that that this year's research topic involved figuring out a solution to a climate problem.

"We decided to build a canal under the Verrazano Bridge, to block water from rising if the ice shelf melted into water," they said. As part of the research, Andrea wrote rap music and choreographed the moves, while Gabriela and Polly wrote the lyrics.

M.S. 51 went on to earn the Research Award.

The National Science Foundation awarded Poly a \$3 million/5-year GK-12 Fellows grant to fund its Applying Mechatronics to Promote Science (AMPS) program. CBRI is funded by Independence Community Foundation with additional funding from JP Morgan Chase.

### Participating Schools:

St. Edmund Elementary School; P.S. 372K; P.S. 193; I.S. 318; M.S. 113; P.S. 58; P.S. 257K; P.S. 8; P.S. 11K; M.S. 821K; Brooklyn Tech High School; P.S. 21K; Friends Crown Heights @ P.S. 221; Benjamin Banneker Academy; I.S. 383K; Bedford Academy; Arthur S. Sommers Middle School; P.S. 636; P.S. 233K; P.S. 261K; P.S. 399K; M.S. 267K; KECSS -- I.S. 468; P.S. 81K; M.S. 50; M.S. 51K; Urban Assembly Institute of Math and Science; I.S. 71K

\*\*\*

### Award Winners:

#### Champion Award

IS 318 (Eugenio Maria de Hostos Intermediate School); Teacher: Russ Holstein; Polytechnic AMPS/CBRI Fellow: Alex Kozak

Runner-Up: P.S. 372K

#### Teamwork Award

P.S. 372K

#### Robot Design Award

1st place: St. Edmund Elementary School  
2nd place: MS 267--Math, Science & Technology Middle School; Teacher: Neil Abell; Polytechnic AMPS/CBRI Fellow: Damion Irving  
3rd place: Arthur S. Somers Middle School 252K

#### Research Award

1st place: MS 51K  
2nd place: P.S. 58K--The Carroll School  
3rd place: P.S. 193K--The Gil Hodges School

#### Performance Award

1st place: I. S. 318K (see above)  
2nd place: Benjamin Banneker Academy; Teacher: Imani Fischer; Polytechnic AMPS/CBRI Fellow: David Li  
3rd place: P.S. 233K--Langston Hughes School; Teacher: Dawn Jokinsky; Polytechnic AMPS/CBRI Fellow: Dmitriy Gayduk

#### Judges Award

P.S. 233K (see above)

#### Additional school invited to the citywide competition (as a "wild card"):

P.S. 11K--Purvis J. Behan School; Teacher: Rasheda Lyons; Polytechnic AMPS/CBRI Fellow: Ilya Brutman

P.S. 21--Crispus Attucks School; Teacher: Carla Arnold; Polytechnic AMPS/CBRI Fellow: Keeshan Williams