PS 21 best in toy robotics contest

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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 coped the tournament's Against All Odds Award.

"Everyone had fun," said Andrey Iannikov, 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.

"I hope my school does this again next year."

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