

Brooklyn Daily Eagle

Volume 49, No. 141, MONDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2003 E-mail: edit@brooklyneagle.com

& DAILY BULLETIN

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Science-Oriented Kids from Across The U.S. Gather at Polytech Conference

Gathering Held in NYC for First Time; Students Housed at Marriott

By Raanan Geberer
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN — What are 16- and 17-years-old interested in? Usually dating, sports, music, movies, homework, friends.

The teens who were at the National Consortium of Specialized Sec-

ondary Schools in Math, Science and Technology conference at Polytechnic University this past weekend are no doubt interested in these things, but they're also interested in biotechnology, engineering, computer technology, robotics, physics and more. And they're part of a select group of about 300 that were sent from high schools

around the country to the conference.

While the conference has been around for many years, this is the first time it's ever been held in New York City. The kids were housed at the New York Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge, four to a room.

For many, it was the first time they were in New York City. "Things we take for granted, they're amazed at," said Shued Ahmed, a Bronx High School of Science student.

"One girl, from Alabama, was surprised that the cars keep honking their horns. And the slang is different. One person said, 'I feel you,' and I said, 'what?' He soon figured out, of course, that it means 'I understand you.'"

The goal isn't necessarily to recruit the students to Polytechnic, said Dr. Noel Kriftcher, former superintendent of Brooklyn/Staten Island High Schools and one of the organizers of this year's conference. "We just want to get them to New York City and see what it has to offer."

The topics of the seminars would be daunting even to most adults. Here are just a few: "The Role of Sampling Stations in Water Quality"; "The Physics of Optics," "Lego Robotics as a Learning Strategy"; "Redevelopment of the Manhattan Waterfront Using Recycled Plastic Pylons"; and even "Prepare for Mars Travel."

This reporter sat in on two seminars. In the first, "The Internet and Recorded Music," a Polytechnic student demonstrated how he recorded a CD onto his computer hard drive, using Windows Media Player. He played it at its normal size, about 20 MB.

He then played it at different levels of compression until he reached the smallest, 8 KB. By this point, it sounded like mud, recorded underwater.

In another seminar, Sang-Hoon Lee, PhD mechanical engineering student at Polytechnic, showed the teens some robots he had constructed. One of these was the six-legged, radio-controlled "Hexapod." Another ran on a track, similar to the slot cars of yesteryear.

For student Kristin Beck, of High Tech High School, Lincroft, N.J., this was her second year at the conference. "Last year, at school, I did a project that was based in part on one of the seminars I saw here."

"This year, I'm sure I'll also be able to work on a project inspired by

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some of the seminars here," said Ms. Beck, who hopes to study computer science and electrical engineering in college.

Polytechnic students acted as greeters and tour-guide leaders for the teens. Two who were interviewed, Jeffrey Chiu and Nercy Escoboy, said they enjoyed working with the high schoolers and giving them a taste of what college life is about.

When not in seminars, they kids were taken on tours of the city — with a science-oriented twist. Some of them were "Brooklyn's Waterfront: Architecture and Engineering"; "Field Study in Prospect Park"; and "Rehabilitation of the Williamsburg Bridge."

Teens from five New York City schools were represented — Stuyvesant, Brooklyn Tech (a co-sponsor of the event), Brooklyn Tech, Staten Island Tech, and the High School of Math, Technology and Science at CCNY.



Sang-Hoon Lee, a PhD student in mechanical engineering at Polytechnic University, left, demonstrates his "hexapod" robot to a visiting high school student at one of the seminars given at the National Consortium of Specialized Secondary Schools in Math, Science and Technology conference. See story, below. Eagle photo by Raanan Geberer