



## Reprint of Article from Newspaper

Date Published: May 4, 2007

### Not just high schoolers can build competitive robots

By Nicolas Grizzle

Following Tech High's recent competition at the FIRST national robotics finals in Atlanta, Georgia two weeks ago, it would seem the robot season is over. Not so. Creekside Middle School held the fifth annual Sonoma County Robotics Challenge on Saturday for 4-8 grade students of 17 schools.

All but one of the schools were from Sonoma County, one being from Marin. Over 150 students filled Creekside's gym, competing in drag racing, sumo, free-form, shot put and "wooks and snarks" events with Lego robots.

Host Creekside was the lone school competing from the Cotati-Rohnert Park district, but Tech High was also involved. The Phantom Robotics team was recruiting for its robotics program, and gave a demonstration of their robot, Gloria Machina, for the students.

The team also stepped up this year to sponsor one school. Tech High's club raised \$500 in scholarships to support the Santa Rosa Accelerated Chartered School.

Creekside teacher Sandy Piazza won a coaching award, given to the "person who goes above and beyond" with their team, said Rick Phelan of the Sonoma County Office of Education. Piazza could not be reached for comment before deadline.

The robots aren't remote controlled, explains Rick Phelan, coordinator of professional development at the Sonoma County Office of Education. Unlike the FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) competition, the programming must be completely done before the events, and the kids cannot touch the bots once they enter each round.

The free-form challenge this year encouraged students to explore uses of robots in the home. One team built a mail-fetching robot, similar to how a dog would get the paper for its master. "Some of it was kind of silly, but throughout, you were just amazed at how students thought about some of these things," said Phelan.

"These kids are pretty smart."

The shot put event yielded such ideas as sling shots, throwing arms and even spinning fans to fling ping pong balls as far as possible. "We didn't anticipate these balls going as far as they did," said Phelan, adding that they exceeded his expectations by about two or three times. "they were all pretty creative."

"Woots and snarks" focused the kids' creativity on moving objects (known as woots and snarks) out of a playing field while keeping opponent's objects in. The sumo event pitted robot v. robot, with the winner pushing the opponent out of the ring.

**Tech High Robotics # 675** Technology High School Sonoma State University - Salazar Hall  
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The coveted "Golden Propellerhead" award went to Hidden Valley School, which placed in the top three of almost all events. The award is the grand prize for best overall performance.

The competition lets students try different solutions to a similar problem, seeking the best one. "It's kind of like the scientific method in action," said Phelan.

The competition is sponsored annually by the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE), Sonoma State University's School of Science and Technology and the Sonoma County Economic Development Board.

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