



TECH HIGH ROBOTICS

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Robotics Club receives major sponsorship

By Nicolas Grizzle

They haven't yet been able to build a "Homework Machine" like Shel Silverstein, but that's OK. Tech High's Robotics Club has a better financial plan than 10 cents per use and their creations function better than the machine which says nine plus four equals three.

The sponsorship from LRG Capital, headed by Marin venture capitalist Larry Goldfarb, challenged the group "to develop a comprehensive business plan and budget," said Tech High Robotics advisor Greg Weaver. That challenge pushed the club to win the Kleiner, Perkins, Caufield and Beyers Entrepreneurship Award at last year's FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics competition and dedicate more time in their "off-season" to fundraising efforts.

The sponsorship from LRG would match all money raised from new donors, and the club announced at a press conference August 18 at Latitude restaurant in Rohnert Park it had raised \$7,485 from new sponsors, earning them a total of \$14,970 in new money.

"I am delighted that we have been able to support the FIRST program at Technology High School," said Goldfarb. "Local businesses have to take an active approach to improve the lives of youth. We can't sustain an economy founded on technology pre-eminence without educating our youth more competently in core technology disciplines such as mathematics, computer science, engineering, and the physical sciences."

Dylan Field is a senior this year at Tech High and a programmer and scout for Phantom Robotics. With excitement in his voice, he explained the new direction of the club.

During the six weeks they have to build the robot for competition in January and February, that's what the 40-member club focuses on. But now, they're focusing on things like public relations, a job Field took on, and fund-raising when they're not building the bot.

Still, it's those six weeks that is their bread and butter. "We function as a club year round, but really we look forward to those six weeks where we build the robot," said Field.

The team has no idea what the robot will look like, do or what parts will be needed yet. That information is released by FIRST in January and the teams are sent a package with parts and a description of the challenge. Field said a running joke on Internet message boards each year is an underwater competition.

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Though it's unlikely, there has been no official word yet from FIRST on whether Speedos and goggles will or will not be included in this year's parts package.

Field said the challenge will likely continue, and any new sponsorships the club continues to receive will probably also be matched by LRG. There are three additional robotics teams in Marin County sponsored by LRG competing in FIRST competitions.

New principal Adam Littlefield was the first principal of the school before returning this year. He started the Robotics Club and now one-sixth of the school is on the team. The school does not have any athletic programs, and some liken the Robotics Club to the school's football team.

"Without (Goldfarb) pushing our team to improve, Tech High Robotics never would have grown by the leaps and bounds that we experienced this year," said Weaver.