

Lego robotics unites Roslyn elementary students after school

By Teri West - February 15, 2019



From left, Roslyn Space Turkey members Russell Plotnitzky, Dylan Sakaria, Caroline Danbusky, Isaac Wang and Eli Jones at a team meeting with their robot Patricia. (Photo by Teri West)

A robot named Patricia is on a mission.

Clipped onto her little Lego body is an attachment with two miniature rubber tires. She's determined to swing it hard enough, and at the perfect angle, for the tires to serve as a mallet, propelling a Lego piece to the top of the mini tower it sits in.

Think a carnival game, but the contestant is a robot whose name happens to be Patricia.

A team of six Roslyn fourth and fifth graders created Patricia.

They built her, they programmed her to complete missions like this one and when they competed with her at a local FIRST LEGO League qualifier in January, they took sixth place, making it into the Long Island Championship that's coming up on March 3.

The six kids call themselves the Roslyn Space Turkeys, and they're this year's iteration of an extracurricular group that a couple moms have been devoting hours to leading every week.

Roslyn Middle School and Roslyn High School both organize teams affiliated with the program, but no such thing exists in Roslyn at the elementary level, so Pam Danbusky and Wendy Wu are running it on their own.

The group meets two days a week at a participant's home, now three days since they've begun preparing for their next competition.

"Some of our success is because they spend so much time together," Dankbusky said. "These guys have inside jokes that we don't understand. They've really formed really nice friendships. We consciously make a large commitment, but we feel really good about it."

Toward the beginning of a Wednesday evening meeting, five of the six kids are plopped on two couches, enthralled in a video about space dust with dramatic orchestral music and slow zooms of stars.

Danbusky and Wu help guide the meetings, encouraging the kids to review FIRST's core values, such as "impact" and "discovery," and ordering pizza for the group.

The kids know more about computer programming than they do, the parents said. And little of that knowledge comes from formal training.

"I just basically learned on my own," said Russell Plotnitzky, 9. "I did some apps about it."

Others were also learning it both outside of school and through school programs such as Hour of Code, Wu said.

Succeeding is more about the effort put forth than prior knowledge, said fifth-grader Caroline Danbusky.

"You don't really need to know how to code," she said. "You just need to try."

FIRST LEGO League exists internationally, founded by the nonprofit FIRST. The organization's name is an acronym: For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology. FIRST says its mission is to generate youth interest in science and technology.

× You can see 5 more articles for free.

[SUBSCRIBE TODAY!](#)

According to a Brandeis University evaluation, it's working.

More than 90 percent of LEGO League participants were shown to have increased interest in the field, based on coach reports. They also demonstrated high rates of improvements in skills such as teamwork, leadership and presentation.

School Business Partnerships of Long Island has been organizing FIRST competitions in the area for 20 years and introduced Lego League 15 years ago.

LEGO League is meant for those ages nine to 14. The Roslyn Space Turkey members unanimously agreed that they aren't intimidated by being three or four years younger than much of their competition.


Every year the program presents a different theme, challenging teams to design a solution to a science-related problem.

For this year's space-travel theme, the Roslyn Space Turkeys came up with the idea for a space suit that would emit an electric charge to protect it from dust. They also designed a device that scans the suit for dust, which it then shoots back out into space, the team explained.

They've written to companies and agencies about their ideas. 3M responded.

"We also made a message for NASA, and they didn't reply," 9-year-old Isaac Wang said.

"They didn't reply - yet," Plotnitzky said strongly emphasizing the "yet."

Teri West
<http://theislandnow.com>
 Teri West is a reporter for Blank Slate Media covering Roslyn and Manhasset.


FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM @THEISLANDNOW_



× You can see 5 more articles for free.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY!