

"Bittersweet Victory"

by Melissa R. Mendelson

Smithtown and Hauppauge students, along with other students, competed in the FIRST (First Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics Competition of 2003, but new security measures involving the war may prevent the winners from going to Texas to compete in the championship.

From March 21-22, 35 teams of high school students and their professional mentors competed in the Long Island Regional competition held at Suffolk Community College in Brentwood. The teams participated in this year's game, "Stack Attack" where the teams' robots collected and stacked plastic storage containers as high as they could under two minutes. Several teams including the Hauppauge High School team were chosen to go to Reliant Park in Houston, Texas to compete in the championship from April 10-12.

Because of the war, many schools are taking precautions such as canceling field trips, and Hauppauge High School is no exception, which won't allow the teachers to go and won't let the team go under their supervision.

Jessica Moore, a Hauppauge High School senior, said, "It's unfortunate that half of the teams won't be there."

"The school isn't allowing us teachers to go, but some parents are still taking their children down to Texas to compete in the championship," Ken Tiu, Hauppauge High School Science teacher and team member, said.

"It's a bittersweet victory for a top-notch team, and it's unfortunate that some of us aren't going," said Jeff Yablon, Science teacher and



Smithtown High School's FIRST Robotics Team with their robot at competition where team garnered "Engineering Inspirations Award."

advisor for the Robotics class and team, "But we wouldn't have made it this far if it wasn't for everyone helping us out especially Ken Tiu, Scott Schuler, and the kids."

Scott Schuler, FESTO Corporation manager of the marketing department, mechanical engineer, and mentor for the team said, "I understand the school's position, and I respect them for not disallowing the parents to make the final decision."

Schuler said he will leave for Texas along with some others from FESTO and bring an additional person from FESTO with them to make up for the absence in the team. Schuler will be joined by several parents who are still taking their kids to the championship.

"It's the school's decision," said Elaine Champey, Smithtown High School Science and Research Coordinator. "I don't think the school would have let us go."

"We are reviewing field trips on a case by case basis, and in some instances may cancel or postpone them," said Charles A. Planz, Superintendent of Schools in a letter addressed to parents. "Depending on the course of events in the next few weeks, we may decide to place additional restrictions on these trips."

Smithtown high school's FIRST robotics team was not chosen to go to Texas. However, the team received an "Engineering Inspirations Award" for

demonstrating inspiration in and developing respect for engineering in their school and community.

"Our students made wonderful connections with the professional engineers as they shadowed the engineers and toured their companies to see what really goes on behind the scenes," said Champey.

"This was my first year being involved with the robotics team," said Michael DiBlasi, a 9th grader. "I had a lot fun."

Robert Pinter, software/hardware engineer from Nordel said, "Through this program, the kids can get an idea of what a technological engineer is all about."

Pinter who is Smithtown's team mentor said for six to eight weeks, the team debated on what they could do to make the robot work better. The team used components from a kit given to them by the Long Island Regional competition and purchased additional parts such as gears from local shops.

"The robot had a radio control and was battery operated," Pinter said. "I look forward to doing this again," he added.

"The idea was to keep the team grounded and build something simple not complicated," said Schuler who had helped the Hauppauge team with their robot for the four years the team has been together.

Tiu said, "Our robot had an autonomous mode where it would drive itself for 15 seconds before we would control it, and it gave us the advantage in the competition."

The Hauppauge robotics team was created from a partnership between the school and FESTO, and the team won three awards this year. The team received two awards from the Long Island Regional competition, the Johnson & Johnson Sportsmanship Award and Delphi "Driving Tomorrow's Technology" Award. The team also received a Creativity award in a New Hampshire competition.

"I like to see the program expand to schools that don't have the cash flow but could partner together," Yablon suggested.



Hauppauge High School Robotics team