

Wheatley Cybercat wins safety award

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Putting their skills to the test, students from The Wheatley School robotics team, the "Cybercats," competed at Hofstra University Saturday, in the School-Business Partnerships of Long Island Long Island FIRST Competition with team safety captain member Alan Czemerinski winning the individual safety award.

Saturday was the final day in the regional tournament, which spanned three days, consisting of over 47 teams in total from all over Nassau and Suffolk county.

The David S. Mack Sports and Exhibition Complex at Hofstra was filled with thousands of spectators showing their excitement by energizing the room with cheers as they watched the different robotics teams compete.

The FIRST Robotics Competition is a national program that challenges teams of students and their mentors to design and build a 130-pound robot in a six-week timeframe using a standard "kit of parts" and a common set of rules.

After six weeks, the team is required to submit their projects and are unable to view it again until the week of competition. The Cybercats received their kit on January 8.

In 1999, the school-business partnership founded Long Island FIRST for the purpose of developing a Long Island Regional FIRST Robotics competition. The Long Island Regional has grown from 8 teams (school districts) in 1999 to over 47 teams in 2010.

The Cybercats placed 30th, halting their chances for a spot in the national tournament next month in St. Louis, but that didn't stop the team from having a great time, and taking home a safety award.

"We would have like to have done better," elected team MVP Andrew Chen said. "We had fun, and it was a good experience with some tough competition."

Team safety captain Czemerinski showed off the safety poster propped up at their pit station, explaining the importance of the poster and how he won his award..

"The officials gathered all of the team safety captains and told them to be in the lookout for teams who are instilling the best safety awareness."

"I sat down with teammate Joe Kim and explained to him what I wanted on the poster and he designed it for us."

This is only the Cybercats third year in the competition, since it was helped founded by team advisor Joseph Fina, a teacher at the Wheatly School.

Originally students at Wheatly had the ability to take three years of computer science and take the AP test Junior year, according to Fina. After their junior year however, those same students as seniors, had no more computer science classes to pursue. Fina wanted to change that.

"We sat down with the department about three years ago and wanted to extend the program and offer students another opportunity," said Fina. "It was a huge undertaking."

The class formed being called the Computer Science Senior Seminar, and was originally slated to offer a curriculum of computer programming, game design and even website design. Only seniors can take the class, but do not require the prerequisite of an AP computer science course.

Fina said that after a short time the robotic building aspect of the course took over and that has been the main theme ever since.

"It's a great way to expose high schoolers to engineering," Fina said.

Team member Steven Davidson noted the team had only been around for a few years.

"We're still a young team," said Davidson. "Mainly our team is made up of members from the computer science classes we took over the years."

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