

UNDERAGE
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Montanamonium

• With the Hannah Montana movie opening in theaters this Friday, fans are breaking into pandemonium over Miley Cyrus. Get the latest on Cyrus and the movie.
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X-Bot marks the spot

Local team to compete in international robot competition

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Have you ever wondered who the future scientists of this world are going to be? Who will our engineers be? Where will they come from? They just might come from robotics teams like mine!

Our team will be competing in an international competition in Atlanta on Wednesday.

Every year, the FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) organization holds a worldwide competition known as FIRST LEGO League, or FLL. In FLL, teams of up to 10 students from the ages of 9 to 14 build LEGO robots to participate. The organizers come up with a different theme for every year. The theme for 2008 was "Climate Connections."

The organizers make new missions related to that year's theme.

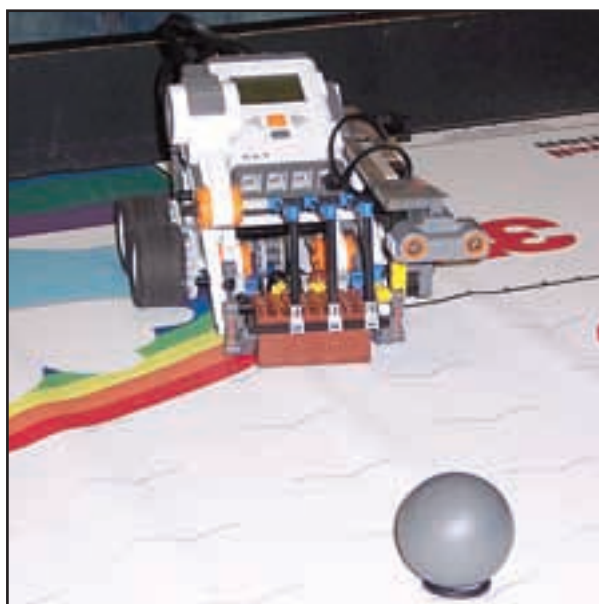
Missions are solved on a 4-by-8 foot table. The challenge is for each team to build and program a robot that can perform as many missions as possible in 2 1/2 minutes. It is a lot harder than it sounds because the robot must be completely autonomous. You're not allowed to use remote controls.

My team, the X-Bots, went to the Regional Qualifying Tournament in Austin. We won second place for Robotic Performance and Research Presentation Divisions, so we advanced to the state tournament, which took place in Austin on Jan. 10. In the month between the two competitions we improved our robot, and at the state tournament we won the second place Champion's Award and the third place Robotic Performance Award. The second place Champions Award is given to the team with the second highest overall score.

We were then invited to the International Competition in Atlanta.

There are 18 missions for us to accomplish this year.

They include collecting carbon dioxide,



BURT, the X-Bots' robot retrieves the ice core. BURT must perform a series of tasks within 2 1/2 minutes.

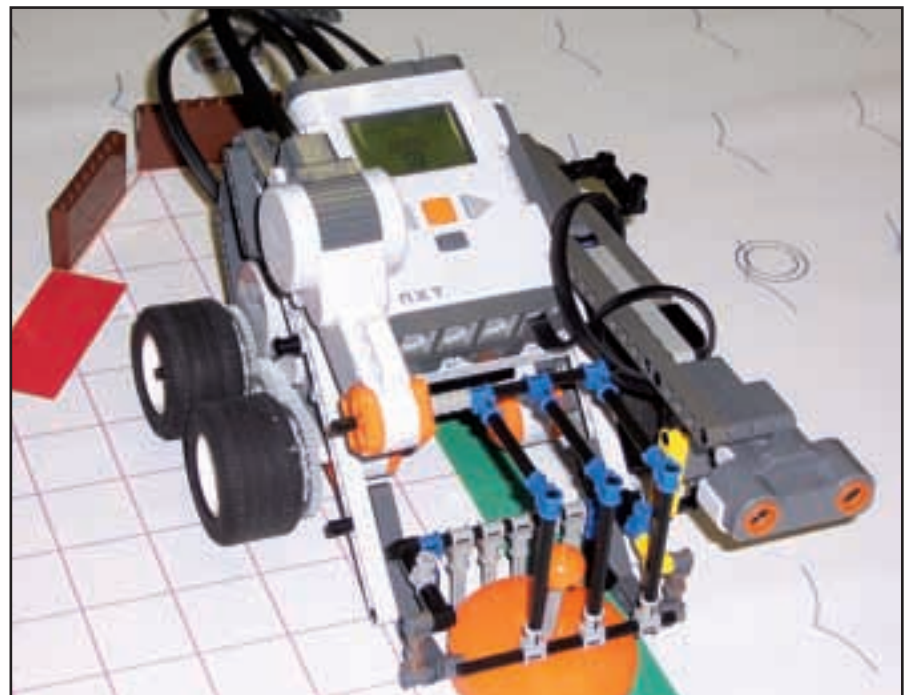
setting up a flood barrier and levees, and raising a house to protect it from flooding. Since the theme is Climate Connections, the competition is all about fixing problems caused by climate. Our robot, which we named BURT, is programmed to accomplish 16 different missions. Unfortunately, since we only have 2 1/2 minutes to accomplish as many missions as possible, BURT messes up sometimes and we have to rescue him, but we can still accomplish 14 missions — which is more than 200 points — on average. The maximum number of points is 400.

The other major component of FLL is the research project. Each team has to research something related to the theme. This year, we had a very specific task: We had to research the major climate problems in our community and find out what our community is doing about it. Then we had to find at least one other city in the world that has the same climate problems, and we had to find out what their solutions were. Once we gathered all the information, we had to present it to the judges in an audio-visual presentation.

We found that our major climate problems are drought and flash flood, and that Rosario, Argentina, has the same problems. The main solutions in Temple are biosolid fertilizer (human waste products that are recycled and treated to be used as fertilizer to reclaim the land) and dam and pipeline rehabilitation projects. The main solutions in Rosario are dam, pipeline, and canal construction and rehabilitation.

We also found that Johannesburg, South

The X-Bots answer questions from the audience during the competition, after their research presentation.



The X-Bots show trophies and plaques they've earned from competition so far this year. Team members from left: Cheyenne Murray, Alex Jaworski, David Weisbruch, Nicolas Kwan and Max Friedman.

Africa, and Zhengzhou, China, have the same problems; however, their solutions are different than ours.

China developed a chemical that, when sprinkled around the roots of a plant, helps the plant to absorb more nutrients from the soil and retain them over a long period of time. That helps the plants to stay alive during drought.

When we had done all our research, we wrote a skit to present the information to the judges. Our skit is superhero-themed. The heroes have powers related to various climate solutions — for example the Builder Boy can build dams and pipelines fast — and the villains are Darth Drought and Lord Flood, who can cause droughts and flash floods to devastate Earth.

We have written the skit twice. We presented our first version at the Austin Maker Faire, and received feedback from an engineer, who told us we needed to put more facts into our skit. We then rewrote the skit to make it more educational and got more compliments and praise.

The last part of the Research Project was optional: we could research a new innovative climate solution and deliver information about it to the judges. We discovered what is called the Max Water windmill. It is a windmill being developed in Australia because they also have problems with drought. The blades of the windmill are specially made so that water moisture in the air will condense on the

blades and then be caught and used. It is still in the prototype stages because the engineers are figuring out how to make it marketable, but they predict that one windmill will supply a house with enough water for daily household use.

There are three months between the state tournament and the international tournament. We took a break during the first month to prevent burnout.

The next two months were spent improving the programming for BURT and attempting to change the design in order to accomplish at least one of the other two missions, and improving our research presentation.

We also did some fundraising so that we can afford the trip, the hotels, and the entrance fee. We hope to win at least one trophy at Internationals.

For information visit Web site: www.centexacademy.com



Name: Judd Messer
Age: 18
School: Belton High School
Grade: 12
Parents: John and Laura Messer
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Who is Judd?:
Yearbook editor
Project Apple Tree volunteer
Varsity baseball
Wildflower Belle escort
Pep rally MC
Belton Tiger Youth Baseball Camp volunteer
Freelance photography

Groups:
FBC Belton youth group
Quill and Scroll National Honor Society
Prom committee

SPOTLIGHT ON YOUTH

Goals in Life:
Attend either University of Texas at Austin, Texas Christian University or Baylor University and study journalism.

What's important to you?
As a senior in high school, the most important things to me are having a strong relationship with all of my family and friends. In the future I'd like to successfully make it through high school and college and find a job that I love going to each and every day.



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