

BUCKS COUNTY Courier Times

Bensalem students have 'high hopes' for robotics challenge

By **ANTHONY DIMATTIA / Staff writer**

Posted Feb 22, 2015 at 12:01 AM

Updated Feb 22, 2015 at 1:00 AM

The Bensalem Fightin' Robotic Owls are all geared up and ready to square off against about 30 other high schools in a robotics competition later this month.

After six weeks of designing and building, the robotics team showed off its "Raptor robot" during a brief demonstration last week at Bensalem High School in anticipation of the district competition that will take place from Feb. 27 to March 1 at Hatboro-Horsham High School.

"I can't wait for the competition, I really want to see how we do," said team member Stephen Mihalik, an 11th-grader.

The group of roughly 30 students is participating for the first time in the "For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology Robotics" competition, which allows students to design, build and practice with a robot made to perform specific tasks, said Kevin McKay, a Bensalem school director and club mentor. The object of this year's game, Recycle Rush, is to stack tote bins and recycle containers on designated spots on a playing field, McKay said.

"We're a rookie team -- the only public school in Bucks County with a FIRST Robotics team," he said.

Since January, the students have spent several weekend hours constructing their 3-foot-tall robot.

"We have all spent so much time working on it and it's just so worth seeing the outcome," Mihalik said. "To see from the drawing of how it's supposed to look and how it looks now in real life is just an amazing feeling."

The team has raised roughly \$11,500 through fundraisers and numerous sponsorships to buy parts to make the robot. Monetary contributions can still be sent to FIRST Robotics at the district administrative office, 3000 Donallen Dr., Bensalem, PA 19020 or through the crowd-sourcing website www.gofundme.com/BHSFIRST.

The group will also compete in its second tournament March 27 though 29 at Hatboro-Horsham High School, where the team will be seeded and join two other teams to form an “alliance partnership,” McKay said. The goal for the team made up mostly of ninth- and 10th-graders is to reach the regional competition in Lehigh County and the national tournament in St. Louis, Missouri, he said.

“We have high hopes,” he said.

The goal of the competition is “to inspire young people to be science and technology leaders, by engaging them in exciting mentor-based programs that build science, engineering and technology skills, that inspire innovation, and that foster well-rounded life capabilities including self-confidence, communication, and leadership,” according to www.usfirst.org/roboticsprograms/frc.

This year’s tournament is estimated to include more than 38,700 teams that are made up of roughly 400,000 students worldwide.

For more information, visit www.bensalemsd.org/firstrobotics or call 215-750-2800, ext. 4555.

Anthony DiMattia: 215-949-4205; email: adimattia@calkins.com; Twitter: [@dailydimattia](https://twitter.com/dailydimattia)