

BUCKS COUNTY Courier Times

Bensalem robotics team wins top rookie award at district competition

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The Bensalem Fightin' Robotic Owls finished their first season on a high note.

The team of roughly 30 Bensalem High School students brought home the Rookie Inspiration Award last week from a competition at Upper Darby High School, said Kevin McKay, a Bensalem school director and club mentor.

“We took some big risks at this competition, hoping to make it to regionals. And the judges definitely took notice by awarding us the Rookie Inspiration Award,” he said.

The award honors the rookie team that displays outstanding success in the commitment to science and technology education at a For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology Robotics competition, McKay said.

“When interviewed by the judges, we brought up that the introduction of a FIRST robotics team to the high school has sort of revitalized its shop program,” 10th-grader Matt Garfield said.

The object of this year's game, Recycle Rush, was to stack tote bins and recycle containers at designated spots on a playing field, which allows students to design, build and practice with a robot made to perform specific tasks.

The team was hoping to reach the regional championship in Lehigh County and then the national tournament in St. Louis but fell short of their goal, McKay said.

They finished 24th out of 35 teams in their second competition.

The students and their “raptor robot” also won the rookie award last month during their first competition. They placed 18th out of 38 teams in that event.

Students spent several weekends in January designing and building their 3-foot-tall robot using tools in the high school's technical education shop, McKay said.

New science, technology, engineering and math classes at the high school will help the team's progression, he said.

"We are a (programming) team so next year we are starting a (programming) class that will feature a robotics section where we program (computer) boards," said Dominic Altimari, an 11th-grader and team programmer.

In the meantime, the team will keep busy prepping for next season, McKay said.

"While we won't find out what next season's game is until January, there's still a lot for us to do between now and then ... from recruiting additional mentors and sponsors, to helping the kids build up additional skills in areas like programming, (computer-aided design) and machining," McKay said. "It's going to be a pretty busy off season."

The team raised about \$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 crowdsourcing website, www.gofundme.com/BHSFIRST.

For more information, visit www.bensalemsd.org/firstrobotics.

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