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South Middle School aces national robotics competition

By Christopher Placek | Daily Herald Staff

Contact writer



From left, Jacki Rohde, 14, and Madeline Hume,14, with Rebekah Kiner,12, and teacher Andy Anderson control the robot on the obstacle course.

MARK WELSH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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PRINT E- MAIL STORY

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Months of designing and building a model robot paid off for two Arlington Heights students.

The mechanical creation of eighth-graders Madeline Hume and Jacki Rohde from South Middle School took first place in a timed obstacle course event at the National Science Olympiad competition last weekend in Augusta, Ga. The two students spent Friday nights and Sunday afternoons over the course of seven months practicing in Hume's basement for competitions at the regional, state and national levels.

By use of controllers, Hume and Rohde directed their robot "Mo" in the "Robo Cross" event at last Saturday's competition at Augusta State University. Using the robot to pick up objects like batteries, golf balls, Legos and coins and placing them in goals, the students scored a match-perfect 412 points in 1 minute 50 seconds. The next closest team finished 25 seconds later.

"We just wanted to do the best we could and our best luckily worked out," Hume said.

The robot course was one of 23 events in the competition. South Middle School placed 17th overall out of 60 teams from across the country in the Olympiad.

"These students are very bright and gifted," said Katie Kaufman, the team's head coach and a seventh-grade science teacher at South. "They are able to absorb things quickly and they like to be challenged intellectually."

Kaufman, who has been involved in Science Olympiad at South since 1990, leads a group of 21 other volunteer coaches, who are teachers, parents and community volunteers.

One of those assistants, Andy Anderson, assisted Hume and Rohde with their robot, which he called a "motorized dustpan." He said the girls' handmade invention of assorted materials was more reliable and less expensive than other teams' models made from robotic kits.

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"It was crude, but effective," Anderson said. "We don't care what it looks like so long as it works."

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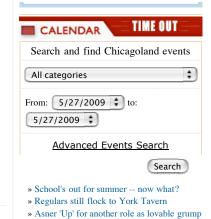
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