EV teams shine in Intel robotics tournament

More than 200 elementary and secondary school students from throughout the East Valley descended on Intel’s Chandler complex last month to vie for robotics distinction.

Of the Chandler teams competing in a FIRST LEGO League regional tournament, two won big awards and two others qualified for the state tournament.

And there were some individuals who won awards as well. Two Intel engineers, Rajneesh Mani and Alan Tu, won the Best Volunteer Award and Best Coach Award, respectively, while Elaina Ashton, a senior at Arizona College Prep – Erie, earned the Best Youth Mentor Award. Coaches and mentors also included Robba Shatik of Intel, Jennifer Warren of American Airlines and Mamadou Diallo of Syntax.

The tournament champion was The Resistance and another Chandler team called the Street Rats won the Core Values Award. Two other Chandler teams, the Golden Knights and the Techno Destroyers, qualified for the state tournament.

A Mesa team of fifth-graders called the Lugnuts and coached by Daja and Russ Harris won the award for best robot design and performance.

The Resistance, sponsored by the nonprofit Education Empowers and coached by Tu and monitored by Elaina, comprises mainly sixth through eighth-graders, although one member, Jenna Carter, is in ninth-grade at Tempe Prep.

Other members include Ethan Ashton, seventh-grader, Kyrene Aprende Middle School; Reid Warren, sixth-grader, Tempe Academy of International Studies; Landin Tu, sixth-grader, Conley Elementary; Bacary Diallo, sixth-grader, Tempe Prep; Trey Fisher, eighth-grader, Kyrene Aprende; Saba Mendoza, seventh-grader, ACP Oakland; and Brooke Sanders, eighth-grader, Basha Mesa.
The Resistance developed a project aimed at cleaning trash in public places with the capability of sorting and shredding, powered by solar panels.

“We had learned, through researching local problems in our community, that trash was a big factor,” Saba explained. “After presenting this data, our team decided that this would be our project.”

Some members were inspired to join the team through their association with Education Empowers. Landin’s father is a coworker with the nonprofit’s founder, Anna Prakash, who is Trey’s mother.

Like most of the participants in the tournament, Resistance members found the competition a fun challenge.

“It is fun overall to be able to find a problem and formulate a solution,” Saba said. “It was also fun to be able to calibrate as a team and work together to create a working idea, that turned into a real thing.”

Added Brooke: “In addition to continuing to help me develop programming skills and skills to research and solve real life problems, the program helped me learn the importance of working as a team to get to the best decisions. I also learned to appreciate the importance of core values such as inclusion while having fun and developing relationships with other students from different schools.”

The Luggnuts is a Mesa team that included Ishikawa Elementary fifth-grader Calvin Campbell and four fifth-grade students from the Mesa Academy for Academic Studies: Dustin Ham, Davis Sterling, Emerson Andrews, and Jayden McConnell.

That team developed a project aimed at stopping wrong-way drivers on Arizona freeways.

Dustin said he enjoyed being able to “think outside of the box to solve problems while Emerson said, “I liked teamwork and building and programming the robots.”

Education Empowers also sponsored another trophy winner, the Street Rats, who were coached by Dominic Siriani, Michael Mowry and Brian Romero. That team includes Arista Prep eighth-grader Connor Friend and three seventh graders: Harper Mowry of SanTan Junior High, Gabriel Garcia or Taylor Junior High and Violent Sanchez of Ward Traditional Academy.

Their project involved floating cities.

“We wanted to explore potential solutions to the problems caused by climate change,” Connor said. “Sea level rise is a problem nearly all cities will face by 2050. We want to solve that problem by building modular floating cities.”

The Golden Knights, affiliated with ICAN Chandler and also sponsored by Education Empowers, will now advance to the state tournament. It includes fifth-graders Daniel Fernandez of Frye Elementary, Joania Apodaca of Hartford Elementary and Jose Medina of Shumway Elementary. The rest of the members, all in fourth grade, includes Stefania Soto, Galveston Elementary; Cole Ogba of Frye, Allison Rios of Bologna, Jonathan Gonzalez of San Marcos and Kayelyn Philpot of Hartford.