

Chandler teams shine in Intel robotics tournament

SANTAN SUN NEWS STAFF

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, Rajnish Maini 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 Robaba Shakiba of Intel, Jennifer Warren of American Airlines and Mamadou Diatta 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.

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

The other members include Ethan Ashton, a seventh grader at Kyrene Aprende Middle School, Ria Nimbkar, an 8th grader at ACP Oakland, Reid Warren, 6th grade, Tempe Academy of International Studies;



Going over their plans that ultimately captured the top award in the FIRST Lego League robotics competition hosted last month by Intel are members of The Resistance, Trey Fisher and Ria Nimbkar. (Chris Mortenson/Staff Photographer)

Landin Tu, 6th grade, Conley Elementary; Bacary Diatta, 6th grade, Tempe Prep; Trey Fisher, 8th Kyrene Aprende; Saba Mendoza, 7th, ACP Oakland; and Brooke Sanders, 8th, BASIS 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 tourna-

ment, 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 formed 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."

"In addition, the opportunity to get exposed to real scientists, engineers and experts in different fields to get more insight on solutions that can be used to solve problems encountered throughout the missions has been wonderful."

Education Empowers also sponsored another trophy winner, the Street Rats, who were coached by Dominic Sirianni, Michael Mowry and Brian Romero. That team includes Arete 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 solu-

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tions 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 6th graders Daniel Fernandez of Frye Elementary, Joanna Apodaca of Hartford Elementary and Jose Medina of Shattuck Elementary. The rest, all in fourth grade, included Stefania Soto, Galveston Elementary; Cole Ogbra of Frye, Allison Rice of Biologos, Jonathan Gonzalez of San Marcos and Kaitlyn Phelpot of Hartford.

1) The Golden Knights, the team that included youth from ICAN, will be advancing to the state tournament. 2) Golden Knight William Flores carefully puts together his part of the team's project. 3) Jagan Samalwar of the Chandler Prep and Clark Clark team, Warrior Robots, was proud of his participation in the Intel-hosted tournament. 4) Madison Lopez, another member of Warrior Robots, looks over the project. 5) Ismael Apodaca and William Flores of the ICAN Golden Knights played key roles in the team's project. 6) Christina Albanese and Angel Ruiz were part of the Hartford Elementary School team, Lion Robots team. 7) Chelsea Allen of the Warrior Robots makes sure all the pieces are where they should be.

All photographs by Chris Mortenson/Staff Photographer

