

Summer robots

Campers show off their creations

By LIZ FINNEGAN

ISLIP TOWN—Fifty three students ages 9 to 16 took part in a rather unusual show and tell last Friday. The kids demonstrated their inventions before family and friends at the conclusion of the one-week FIRST Robotics Summer Day Camp that was held at Dowling College.

It had been the second year that the For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology camp was offered through the college and School-Business Partnership of Long Island. Camp director, Janet Anderson, who is with SBPLI, said that there were 44 school districts in both Nassau and Suffolk counties participating this year, which is five to six times the national average for this type of a program. Locally, the school districts of Sayville, East Islip, Bay Shore and Patchogue-Medford were represented.

“This is a hands-on program,” said Anderson. “We want to get the kids interested ... in a career in science.”

SBPLI is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization that was founded in 1984 as a way to link high schools with Long Island businesses in the hope of influencing career curricula in schools while highlighting the fields of science and technology. The FIRST Robotics national competition in high schools, which challenges students to build a robot that could perform specific tasks within a six-week time frame, is one of their programs. The First Lego League targets elementary and middle school students. The organization has kept records of the amount of scholarship money the students they’ve mentored have received over the years and Anderson noted that to date, that number is more than \$8 million.

At the camp, participants were organized into teams according to age and with the help of an advisor were able to design a robot with a specific function, build it to their specifications and finally were able to explain its workings during a demonstration session. Some of the projects

worked as planned; others needed a bit more tweaking. It didn’t matter though. Aside from the desired technical aspect of the program, campers seemed to get so much more: the satisfaction of achieving a goal.

Brandon Roman, a 14-year-old incoming freshman in the Patchogue-Medford School District, summed up his own experience. “I like working in technology. And here, I [also] learned how to work with others in a team.” ■



AT LEFT: Dr. Elana Zolfo, senior vice-president of Dowling College congratulates the students and their families just before the robot demonstrations. **AT RIGHT:** A team prepares to show how their robot works.

SCN/Finnegan