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[Robots a hit in Berthoud](#)

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Photo by John Janich

One of the impressive robots at the LEGO Robotics tournament held at BHS last weekend. This robot, which costs over \$14,000 is capable of shooting basketballs.

By Claudia Todd

The Berthoud Recorder

In the words of Ed Sullivan, this was a “really big show.” Nobody in Berthoud knew just how big this would be.

More than 300 students participated in the FIRST LEGO League (FLL) tournament at Berthoud High School last Saturday. Thompson FLL director, Liz Rayment, coordinated more than 70 volunteers to cohesively orchestrate the first FLL competition to be held in Berthoud. Rayment

and husband Ken communicated with many of the other volunteers who acted as schedulers and timers via two-way radios as they pulled off a smoothly run day full of competition and camaraderie.

Thirty-four teams from the area packed the BHS gym as they participated in the first FLL tournament to be held in Berthoud. This competition attracted 13 teams from within the Thompson School District and 21 teams from a broader surrounding area. Participants were happy to commute from Windsor and Fort Collins because the Poudre District FLL has had to turn away teams because of the high level of interest and participation in the competitions.

While this level of robotic engineering competition is new to Berthoud, many Berthoud residents have participated in competition held in other nearby venues. More than 88,000 students, ages 9-14, and more than 3,500 6-9 year olds participated in FLL throughout the U.S. in 2006, according to FLL statistics. There are many more students also involved in the international leagues.

Eighteen years ago, Dean Kamen, Segway inventor, founded a group, “To create a world where science and technology are celebrated . . . where young people dream of becoming science and technology heroes.” That was the humble beginning of FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology). In 1998, FIRST and LEGO combined to form the FIRST LEGO League to guide students as they “solve real-world engineering challenges, develop important life skills, and learn to make positive contributions to society.”

Those challenges and opportunities were evident Saturday where double the amount of non-team-related spectators cheered for their favorite teams. The BHS gym, commons area and several classrooms were filled with robots and props made from LEGO products. During the fast-paced competition between teams, it was not uncommon to hear emcee Robb Sommerfeld (BHS shop teacher) announce, “Whoever has the solar panel from table 4B, please return it,” or, “Someone has the dam from table 2A; please return it for the next round.”

This year’s competition was entitled “Power Puzzle, Energy Resources – Meeting the Global Demand.” Encouraged by adult coaches, the team members had a detailed mission to complete as they competed head-to-head at tables equipped for two teams. Points were awarded or deducted according to the teams’ adherence to the guidelines for making energy-friendly adaptations to an existing “property.” A hydrogen-powered car could replace other vehicles while wind turbines and dams could be used to harness alternative forms of power. Each team had to also “plant” trees and address issues such as coal and uranium mining.

True to the mission of FLL, these competitors had to solve problems that are pertinent to everyone in today’s energy-stressed environment. As one judge said, “These kids are coming up with engineering solutions that I see in the professional world.”

BHS Principal Leonard Sherman has been so impressed with the professionalism and preparations for the competition that the high school leadership has decided to pursue the FIRST Robotics Competition (FLL at the high school level) next year. The income from the concession sales will go toward funding those first high-school-level FRC teams.

Rayment had also incorporated a team-building exercise that had the students walking to the Little Thompson Observatory where volunteers explained the workings of the observatory. The exercise allowed the students to get a little fresh air as they walked between the buildings, learn about one of the two Berthoud observatories and then teach them to return to their posts within the short amount of time allotted to this part of the day's activities.

Throughout the day, an attitude of gratefulness filled the air. Students signed large thank-you cards to the corporate sponsors that had been posted on the wall. As Rayment said, "We couldn't do this without GE Energy, Woodward Governor, Advanced Energy and Agilent. Of course, the volunteers were indispensable and we hope they'll be back to help next year."

The volunteers also radiated gratitude for the opportunity to participate. A large group of tired, but energized, volunteers shared that it was exciting to participate in an activity that drew as large a crowd as sports events.

True to Kamen's plans, science and technology heroes abounded in the first Thompson FLL District Tournament in Berthoud. For more information, visit firstlegoleague.org.

***** Webmaster's Note: If there is enough public interest in seeing the majority of photos from the event over the course of the next few days, we will post an online slide-show. If this article receives more than 100 hits on any given day between now and next Wednesday we will include a link to the slide-show. *****