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TOWN HIRES CONSULTANT TO DEVELOP BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN MASTER PLAN

Advisory commission will seek volunteers to help collect data

By JUDY PETERSON

Los Gatos has hired a consultant to develop a town-wide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan that will include public outreach to residents and schools. The plan will incorporate information that's already being gathered for a school traffic study, but there will be a lot of new information-gathering, too, that will assess the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians.

Parks and public works director Matt Morley discussed the plan during the April 5 town council meeting.

Morley said students who bike or walk to school will be counted before the current school year ends on June 2; they will be counted again in the fall.

In between, the focus will be on the needs of other residents who walk and bike around town.

"The measures would occur on the weekends during the summer for sure, because that significantly affects

Bikes, page 8

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Los Gatos High School robotics team members, from left, Josh Anderson, Jacob Snyder and Michael Hand work on their robot between matches. The Los Gatos team competed in the field of 66 schools at the 18th annual Silicon Valley Regional FIRST Robotics Competition held last week at San Jose State University.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGE SAKKESTAD

digitalfirst



Judges at the 2016 FIRST Robotics Competition inspect Saratoga High School's robot before it engages in a match.



Michael Hand of the Los Gatos High robotics team rolls the robot onto the competition floor.

Rumbling Robots

Los Gatos and Saratoga teams send robots into action at 18th annual Silicon Valley FIRST Robotics Competition

By KHALIDA SARWARI

Photographs by GEORGE SAKKESTAD

The sporadic cheering and clapping from the bleachers was interrupted every few minutes by buzzers going off and an announcer providing a play-by-play of the action on the court.

To the casual observer standing in the halls of the Event Center at San Jose State University, the action inside the venue sounded very much like a basketball game, but a peek into the commotion inside revealed a whole different world.

In place of a smooth court, there was a 54-inch by 26-inch playing field called the "pit," flanked by hoops on either side and a net in the middle. Instead of towering men running back and forth, it was robots that were being maneuvered from

behind screens, tumbling about frenetically in their quest to grab volleyball-size balls and make shots for their "alliance."

And just like that, another match was over, the robots were wheeled off the field as a giant screen flashed the judges' score and the Vengaboys' "We Like to Party" blared over the speakers.

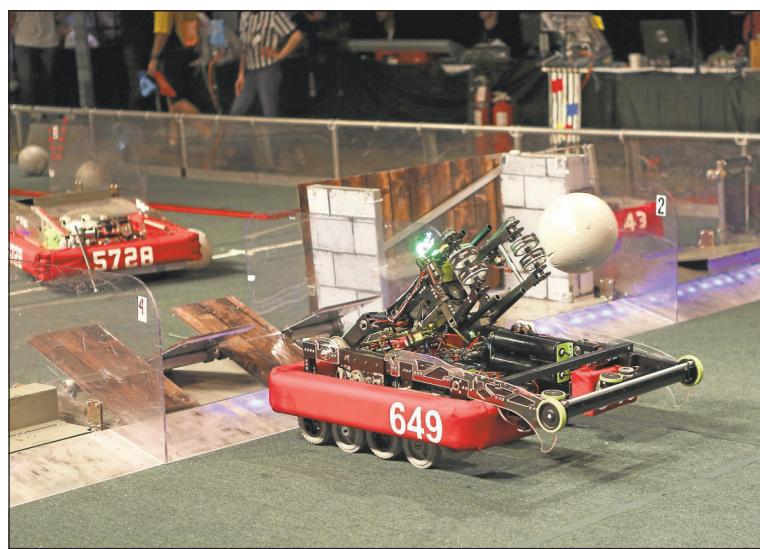
This was the scene on the morning of April 8, the first day of the 18th annual Silicon Valley Regional FIRST Robotics Competition (FIRST stands for For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) where 66 high school teams competed against each other for a chance at the national tournament in St. Louis, Mo., and ultimately for \$20 million in scholarships. Each school played in a series

of matches over two days where they were placed in one of two alliances along with two other schools. Students from each team were tasked with maneuvering their robots around the playing field by bypassing their opponent's defenses and scoring points by shooting the balls.

The competition kicked off in January when the teams were informed of the details of this year's contest and provided with a kit containing motors, batteries, a control system and a mix of automation components with instructions for their robot design. They had six weeks to plan, design and build their robots for the games on April 8 and 9.

Saratoga and Los Gatos were

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Saratoga High School's robot competes in the 2016 FIRST Robotics Competition. The robot can be remotely controlled to shoot a ball through a goal.

Robotics

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among the 66 high schools competing, and both teams had to overcome a few odds even before the competition got rolling.

Nerves were higher than usual the day before the competition when members of Saratoga's Mechanical Science and Engineering Team found their robot to be unresponsive. The reason, they quickly learned, was because the central control system wasn't able to communicate with a sensor, which essentially made the robot "blind" and difficult to control.

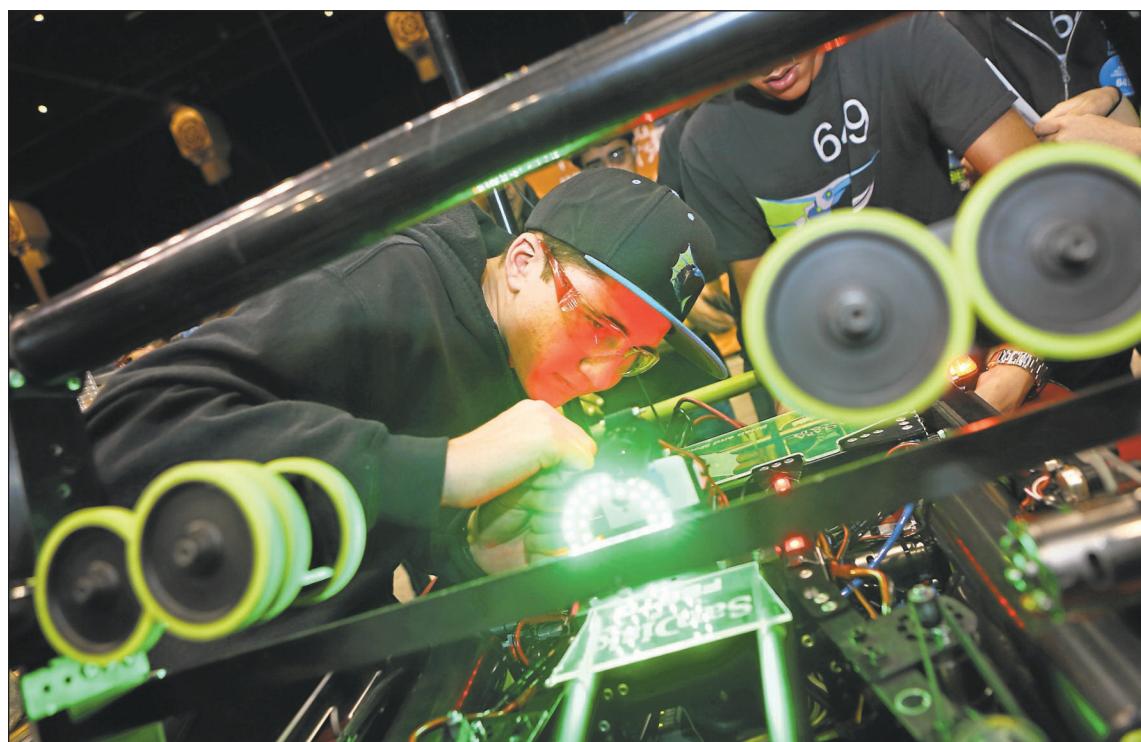
It was a long night of pizza, Red Bull, panicking and problem-solving for the students, but by morning they'd gotten to the root of the problem and fixed it.

When MSET started back in 2009, the team had no more than a few dozen members; today it boasts a membership of 80 students. Of that, 28 participated in the FIRST competition, serving in any one of the four crews, from scouting other teams to driving the actual robot or working to repair the robot and get it ready for the next match.

Last year, Saratoga's robotics team made it as far as the quar-



Los Gatos High School robotics team members, from left, Gautam Prabhu, Michael Hand and Ari Schreiman control their robot remotely during one of the numerous matches played through the first day of competition at the 18th annual Silicon Valley Regional FIRST Robotics Competition held last week at San Jose State University.



Saratoga's David Dolca checks the vision system on the back of an Android phone that's used for targeting. The vision system relies on the reflection of the green LED rings from the target.

terinals. This year, they advanced to the semifinals, where they lost to world champions Bellarmine College Preparatory and Citrus Circuits, a team from Davis. They also took home the Imagery Award, which is given to the team with the best-looking and -performing robot.

While they didn't make it to St. Louis, they still accomplished their team's mission to engage students in science and allow everyone to have a role in building the robot.

For 17-year-old senior Adithya Bellathur, who has been a member of Saratoga High's robotics club for all four years, meeting the other teams was his favorite part of the competition this year.

"Each team has a different approach to the game, and seeing all the different outcomes of people's hard work is really amazing," he said. "You learn a lot from that. Also, seeing all the outcome of your work of the past 10 weeks is exhilarating."

Fellow senior and club presi-

dent Kabir Manghani, 17, echoed Adithya's sentiments. Kabir said he spent 45 hours a week in the lab on top of his schoolwork and 100 years during his spring break, at times staying up until 2 a.m. to tinker with the robot.

"I think for me, it's the adrenaline and it's pushing yourself to be the very best you can and performing at the very highest level possible with a group of people that are very dedicated," he said. "The thrill of doing something you are definitively good at, with people who care just as much as you and who work just as hard as you, it's exhilarating."

For Los Gatos' Iron Claw team, it was their first time back in the contest since 2007, when the robotics club was disbanded following the departure of Doug Muntz, the metal shop teacher who ran the program up until his retirement. Some of the students flocked to Pioneer High

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Los Gatos High School robotic team members Gautam Prabhu, front, and Ari Schreiman control their robot remotely during competition.

Robotics

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School and joined that school's robotics team, but have since returned to help in the formation of their own school's robotics club and FIRST team.

"Pioneer was really awesome, but it was also really cool to start a new team and just sort of create a new culture for what we want Los Gatos to be and what we envision for that," said 16-year-old junior Ari Schreiman, who was a member of the Pioneer team his freshman and sophomore years.

Along with fellow junior Matt Benson, also 16, Ari was among a group of students who helped fundraise \$20,000 to bring robotics back to LGHS. The club now has a few dozen members, most of whom participated in the FIRST competition. The team ended up placing 25th.

"I feel really good [about the outcome] because we're a startup team this year, so it's amazing that we beat a bunch of teams that [have been] around

for 10 years," said Matt, who served as his team's electrical captain.

Prior to one of their matches, the Iron Claw team had a hurdle of their own to overcome when one of the shafts on their robot snapped. A handful of the boys huddled around a toolbox to determine whether to use a belt or chain to fix the issue, before opting to take their

robot to the communal machine shop to get a replacement axle.

For a first-year team, Ari said he was happy with how he and his teammates did. After all, the team's mission this year, he said, was to do their best.

"We were really trying to do the best we could as a beginning team," he said. "It was just great to do well."



Saratoga High robotics team members, from left, David Doluca, Kyle France, Naveed Riazat and Aditya Chaudhry move their robot from the competition field back to the pit area.