

Building expert connections across the world

WLH students share robotics savvy in China.

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Three Westlake High School robotics team students travelled to Shenzhen, China, this summer to help robotics teams in China get in gear for competition. They were among several international teams who traveled to China to fos-

ter international partnerships between robotics students.

"The whole goal was to help the Chinese teams get started," said WLH senior Rachel Gardner, who went on the trip. "We were invited as international experts to come and teach them the skills involved a couple days before the competition. They made robots from scratch over the course of about three days."

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West Lake Hills robotics student Abby Audet (right) works with a Chinese student on his team's robot during the China Robotics Challenge this summer. CONTRIBUTED

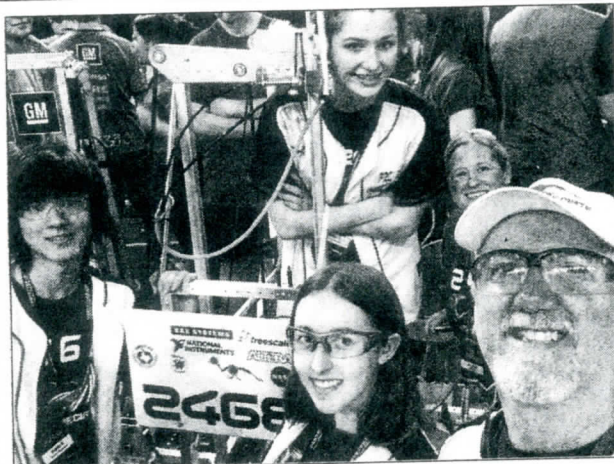
Robotics

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The decision for three WLH students to go to China for two weeks for the China Robotics Challenge was pretty last minute, robotics instructor Norman Morgan said. But the chance was a unique one for the robotics students, and so he and his wife chaperoned Gardner as well as students Abby Audet and Lewis Jones.

"There were 39 total teams in the tournament, and 11 of those were international teams and 11 of those were Chinese teams that had competed previously," Morgan said. "The rest of the teams are all what would be considered rookies ... (but) they were competing and building a varsity-style robot."

Gardner is no stranger to China. Gardner has been to China before and speaks Mandarin Chinese, which helped a great deal in communicating with the Chinese



The WLH robotics team, featuring Lewis Jones (left), Abby Audet (center, back) and Rachel Gardner (center, front) stand with their professor Norman Morgan and his wife, Jennifer Morgan, during the China Robotics Challenge in Shenzhen, China. CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

students, she said.

"For the most part, the students spoke very basic English if anything, and the translators got tied up in other things. My knowledge of the language was really important," Gardner said. "I even had to translate really official presentations because they didn't have other translators. That was dif-

ferent for me because I'd studied all conversational Mandarin and didn't know technical terms, so a lot of times I would point to demonstrate and use simplistic vocabulary, and they found that pretty amusing."

The students were tasked with building a robot that could complete various tasks,

including stacking items on top of one another. In addition to brushing up on their hardware and software building skills, the trio saw other American students they knew from other robotics competitions during the school year.

"Some of those teams were teams that we've competed with over the years, so it was nice to be able to get to know them and spend two weeks with them," Morgan said. "We got to do a lot of bonding and got to know some of the teams. That was something I'd never considered beforehand, that we'd develop strong relationships and bonds and friendships, in our team as well as with other teams."

Despite the language difference, the team managed to coach the Chinese teams to success — a couple of the teams they assisted won awards in the competition. A couple of the Chinese teams have committed to coming to San Antonio during

the coming school year for a competition.

"I think this is the start of a wonderful partnership between (our team) and the Chinese teams we met and mentored," Audet said in a statement. "I also look forward to seeing the international teams we became friends with at future competitions. It was so rewarding to see the teams compete and score points. Seeing them so excited to be doing well and winning awards was incredible."

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