

Statesman

Chap Robotics makes appearance in new Transformers movie

By Jack Stenglein

Posted Jul 16, 2014 at 12:01 AM

Updated Sep 26, 2018 at 9:47 PM

Not all of the robots in Transformers: Age of Extinction are computer-generated images. Seven robots built by Chaps Robotics Team 2468 Team Appreciate made short appearances in the film, which had a \$300 million opening weekend.

It is just one of several high-profile accomplishments of Westlake High School's FIRST Robotics Team, from members filing a patent application for a remote control they built to building a robot to zoom through the last yards of the Austin Marathon.

"If you weren't a FIRST Robotics fan, you probably wouldn't notice, but it's definitely a talking point for us and for other FIRST teams too," robotics coach Norman Morgan said. "I think it's definitely brought more attention to our program. We've seen our likes and follows on Facebook and Twitter nearly double, and we've seen lots of feedback from other [FIRST] teams on Facebook and Twitter."

The robots got their role in the movie when one of the set designers saw the team demoing robots at Maker Faire last May. He later came to Westlake and looked through the robotics team's inventory. He then picked a robot named "Spud" along with other robots, motors and batteries. Chap Robotics received about \$1,300 for leasing the equipment to the filmmakers, who kept the items for about two weeks.

"I was real surprised, first of all that they were out looking for robots and then even more so that they wanted our robot to perform in one of the shots," Morgan said. "I'm very proud of our program though and very excited that we get to demonstrate something our kids built."

In the movie, Spud shoots basketballs as Mark Wahlberg, who plays the main character of Cade Yeager, calls out its name. The other robots on set were part of the background and were not active during the scene. While Spud was only functioning for about seven seconds, the robot was onscreen for much longer. Furthermore, Yeager's company, Yeager Robotics, uses the logo of Team Appreciate. The logo appears several times throughout the early parts of the movie.

"It was kind of awesome that the Chaps Robotics logo had several appearances in the movie in different locations of the set," FRC team member junior David Wahlig said. "Having our logo seen by millions will give Chap Robotics a lot of recognition."

During filming of the movie, Jake Cooper, a recent Westlake graduate, was on set in order to operate and control Spud.

"It was really cool to see the level of team work that went on at the set," Cooper said. "Everyone had their role and their job and their task, and they did what needed to be done. I thought that was a really good example and execution of teamwork. It was also interesting to talk with [actress] Nicola Peltz. She's actually the same age as me, so she started talking to me and asking questions about the robot. It was cool to see people interested in FIRST and robotics like that."

Before the movie released, Transformers premiered for approximately 400 people in Austin. Robotics students, families and friends attended a special viewing of the movie June 25, two days prior to the actual release of the movie, at Galaxy Highland Theater.

"The prescreening was very exciting," Morgan said. "Everyone in the theater was involved in FIRST Robotics in some way, whether they were a student or parent or mentor. It was exciting to have all of us in there watching for our robot and our logo and cheering when we saw it."

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