

Students share robotics savvy in China

By Rachel Rice

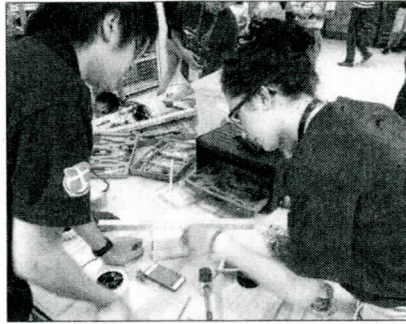
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WEST LAKE HILLS — Three Westlake High School robotics team students travelled to Shenzhen, China, this summer to help robotics teams in China get in gear for competition. They were among several international teams who travelled to China to foster international partnerships between robotics students.

“The whole goal was to help the Chinese teams get started,” said 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.”

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



West Lake Hills student Abby Audet works with a Chinese student on his team's robot during a competition in China last summer. CONTRIBUTED

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 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.”

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.

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.

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